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ZIBELINE

PHILIPPE DE MASSA



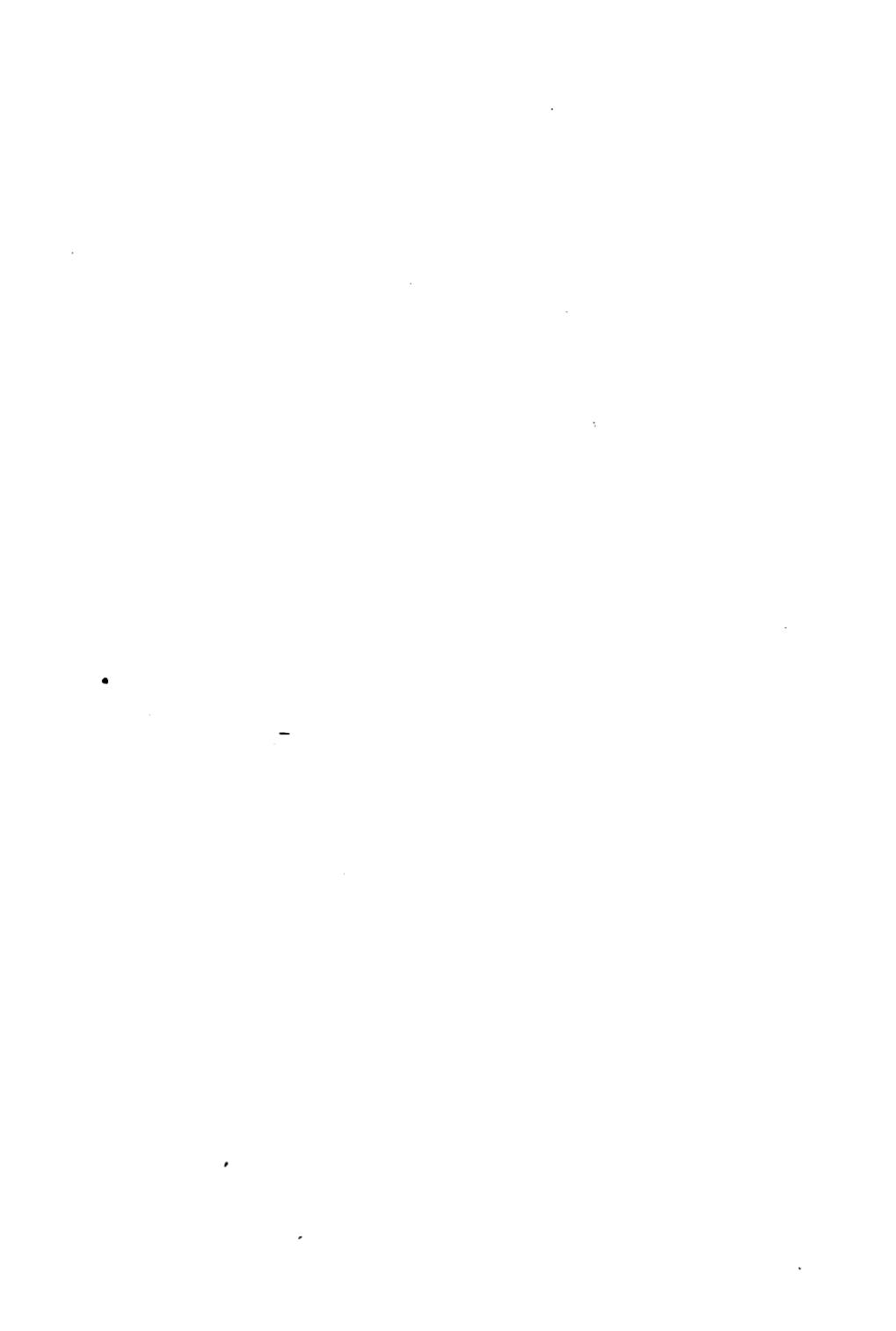


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BY
PHILIPPE DE MASSA

Crowned by the French Academy

Philippe de Massa

(*In the uniform of the Chasseurs à Cheval.*)

[From (*The Original Drawings By Philippe de Massa*.)]

RANOUS.) With Prefaces by
PAUL HERVIEU and JULES
CLARETIE, of the French Academy



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ALEXANDRE-PHILIPPE-REGNIER DE MASSA



LEXANDRE-PHILIPPE-REGNIER MARQUIS DE MASSA, soldier, composer, and French dramatist, was born in Paris, December 5, 1831. He selected the military career and received a commission in the cavalry after leaving the school of St. Cyr. He served in the Imperial Guards, took part in the Italian and Franco-German Wars and was promoted Chief of Squadron, Fifth Regiment, Chasseurs à Cheval, September 10, 1871. Having tendered his resignation from active service, he was appointed a lieutenant-colonel in the territorial army February 3, 1880. He has been decorated with the Legion of Honor.

The Marquis de Massa is known as a composer of music and as a dramatic author and novelist. At the Opéra Comique there was represented in 1861 *Royal-Cravate*, written by him. Fragments of two operas by him were performed at the Paris Conservatory of Music in 1865, and in 1868. The list of his principal plays

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PREFACE

follows: *Le Service en campagne*, comedy (1882); *La Cicatrice*, comedy (1885); *Au Mont Ida, Fronsac à La Bastille*, and *La Cœur de Paris*, all in 1887; *La Czarine* and *Brouillé depuis Magenta* (1888), and *La Bonne Aventure*—all comedies—1889. Together with Petipa he also wrote a ballet *Le Roi d'Yvetot* (1866); music by Charles Labarre. He further wrote *Zibeline*, a most brilliant romance (1892) with an Introduction by Jules Claretie; crowned by the Académie Française. This odd and dainty little story has a heroine of striking originality, in character and exploits. Her real name is Valentine de Vermont, and she is the daughter of a fabulously wealthy French-American dealer in furs, and when, after his death, she goes to Paris to spend her colossal fortune, and to make restitution to the man from whom her father won at play the large sum that became the foundation of his wealth, certain lively Parisian ladies, envying her her rich furs, gave her the name of Zibeline, that of a very rare, almost extinct, wild animal. Zibeline's American unconventionality, her audacity, her wealth, and generosity, set all Paris by the ears. There are fascinating glimpses into the drawing-rooms of the most exclusive Parisian society, and also into the historic greenroom of the Comédie Française, on a brilliant "first night." The man to whom she makes graceful restitution of his fortune is a hero of the Franco-Mexican and Franco-Prussian wars, and when she gives him back his property, she throws her heart in with the gift. The story is an interesting study of a brilliant and unconventional American girl as seen by the eyes of a clever Frenchman.

PREFACE

Later came *La Revue quand même*, comedy, (1894); *Souvenirs et Impressions* (1897); *La Revue rétrospective*, comedy (1899); and *Sonnets* the same year.



A large, flowing cursive signature of "Paul Hervieu" is written across the page. Below the signature, the text "de l'Académie Française." is printed in a smaller, sans-serif font.

LETTER FROM JULES CLARETIE TO THE AUTHOR

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I have often declared that I never would write prefaces! But how can one resist a fine fellow who brings one an attractive manuscript, signed with a name popular among all his friends, who asks of one, in the most engaging way, an opinion on the same—then a word, a simple word of introduction, like a signal to saddle?

I have read your *Zibeline*, my dear friend, and this romance—your first—has given me a very keen pleasure. You told me once that you felt a certain timidity in publishing it. Reassure yourself immediately. A man can not be regarded as a novice when he has known, as you have, all the Parisian literary world so long; or rather, perhaps, I may more accurately say, he is always a novice when he tastes for the first time the intoxication of printer's ink.

You have the quickest of wits and the least possible affectation of gravity, and you have made as well known

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in Mexico as in Paris your couplets on the end of the Mexican conflict with France. *Tout Mexico y passera!* Where are they, the *tol-de-rols* of autumn?

Yesterday I found, in a volume of dramatic criticism by that terrible and charming Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, an appreciation of one of your comedies which bears a title very appropriate to yourself: *Honor*. "And this play does him honor," said Barbey d'Aurevilly, "because it is charming, light, and supple, written in flowing verse, the correctness of which does not rob it of its grace."

That which the critic said of your comedy I will say of your romance. It is a pretty fairy-story—all about Parisian fairies, for a great many fairies live in Paris! In fact, more are to be found there than anywhere else! There are good fairies and bad fairies among them. Your own particular fairy is good and she is charming. I am tempted to ask whether you have drawn your characters from life. That is a question which was frequently put to me recently, after I had published *L'Americaine*. The public longs to possess keys to our books. It is not sufficient for them that a romance is interesting; it must possess also a spice of scandal.

Portraits? You have not drawn any—neither in the drawing-rooms where Zibeline scintillates, nor in the *foyer* of the Comédie Française, where for so long a time you have felt yourself at home. Your women are visions and not studies from life—and I do not believe that you will object to my saying this.

You should not dislike the "romantic romance,"

PREFACE

which every one in these days advises us to write—as if that style did not begin as far back as the birth of romance itself: as if the Princess of Clèves had not written, and as if Balzac himself, the great realist, had not invented, the finest “romantic romances” that can be found—for example, the amorous adventure of General de Montriveau and the Duchesse de Langlais!

A propos, in your charming story there is a General who pleases me very much. How was it that you did not take, after the fashion of Paul de Molènes, a dashing cavalry officer for your hero?—you, for whom the literary cavalier has all the attractions of a gentleman and a soldier?

Nothing could be more piquant, alert, chivalrous—in short, worthy of a Frenchman—than the departure of your hero for the war after that dramatic card-party, which was also a battle—and what a battle!—where, at the end of the conflict, he left his all upon the green cloth. That is an attractive sketch of the amiable comedienne, who wishes for fair weather and a smooth sea for the soldier lover who is going so far away. It seems to me that I have actually known that pretty girl at some time or another! That chapter is full of the perfume of pearl powder and iris! It is only a story, of course, but it is a magnificent story, which will please many readers.

The public will ask you to write others, be sure of that; and you will do well, my dear friend, for your own sake and for ours, to follow the precept of Denis Diderot: “My friends, write stories; while one writes them he amuses himself, and the story of

PREFACE

life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories we can tell."

I do not know precisely whether these last words, which are slightly pessimistic, are those of the good Diderot himself. But they are those of a Parisian of 1892, who has been able to forget his cares and annoyances in reading the story that you have told so charmingly.

With much affection to you, and wishing good luck to *Zibeline*, I am

Your friend,

A cursive signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jules Claretie".

de l'Académie Française.

APRIL 26, 1892.

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CHAPTER I

LES FRÈRES-PROVENÇAUX



N the days of the Second Empire, the Restaurant des Frères-Provençaux still enjoyed a wide renown to which its fifty years of existence had contributed more than a little to heighten its fame.

This celebrated establishment was situated near the Beaujolais Gallery of the Palais Royal, close to the narrow street leading to the Rue Vivienne, and it had been the rendezvous of epicures, either residents of Paris or birds of passage, since the day it was opened.

On the ground floor was the general dining-room, the gathering-place for honest folk from the provinces or from other lands; the next floor had been divided into a succession of private rooms, comfortably furnished, where, screened behind thick curtains, dined somewhat "irregular" patrons: lovers who were in either the dawn, the zenith, or the decline of their often ephemeral fancies. On the top floor, spacious

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salons, richly decorated, were used for large and elaborate receptions of various kinds.

At times the members of certain social clubs gave in these rooms subscription balls of anacreontic tendencies, the feminine element of which was recruited among the popular gay favorites of the period. Occasionally, also, young fellows about town, of different social rank, but brought together by a pursuit of amusement in common, met here on neutral ground, where, after a certain hour, the supper-table was turned into a gaming-table, enlivened by the clinking of glasses and the rattle of the croupier's rake, and where to the excitement of good cheer was added that of high play, with its alternations of unexpected gains and disastrous losses.

It was at a reunion of this kind, on the last evening in the month of May, 1862, that the salons on the top floor were brilliantly illuminated. A table had been laid for twenty persons, who were to join in a banquet in honor of the winner of the great military steeple-chase at La Marche, which had taken place a few days before. The victorious gentleman-rider was, strange to say, an officer of infantry—an unprecedented thing in the annals of this sport.

Heir to a seigneurial estate, which had been elevated to a marquisate in the reign of Louis XII, son of a father who had the strictest notions as to the preservation of pure blood, Henri de Prerolles, early initiated into the practice of the breaking and training of horses, was at eighteen as bold and dashing a rider as he was accomplished in other physical exercises;

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and although, three years later, at his *début* at St. Cyr, he expressed no preference for entering the cavalry service, for which his early training and rare aptitude fitted him, it was because, in the long line of his ancestors—which included a marshal of France and a goodly number of lieutenants-general—all, without exception, from Ravenna to Fontenoy, had won renown as commanders of infantry.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, Henri's grandfather, who had distinguished himself in the American War for Independence, left his native land only when he was in the last extremity. As soon as circumstances permitted, he reentered France with his son, upon whom Napoleon conferred a brevet rank, which the recipient accepted of his free will. He began his military experience in Spain, returned safe and well from the retreat from Russia, and fought valiantly at Bautzen and at Dresden. The Restoration—by which time he had become chief of his battalion—could not fail to advance his career; and the line was about to have another lieutenant-general added to its roll, when the events of 1830 decided Field-Marshal the Marquis de Prérrolles to sheathe his sword forever, and to withdraw to his own estate, near the forest of l'Ile-d'Adam, where hunting and efforts toward the improvement of the equine race occupied his latter years.

He died in 1860, a widower, leaving two children: Jeanne, recently married to the Duc de Montgeron, and his son Henri, then a pupil in a military school, who found himself, on reaching his majority, in pos-

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session of the château and domains of Prérolles, the value of which was from fifteen to eighteen hundred thousand francs.

Having been made sub-lieutenant by promotion on the first day of October, 1861, the young Marquis, already the head of his house and a military leader, asked and obtained the favor of being incorporated with a battalion of *chasseurs* garrisoned at Vincennes.

Exact in the performance of his military duties, and at the same time ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, he was able, thanks to his robust health, to conciliate the exigencies of the one with the fatigues of the other.

Unfortunately, Henri was fond of gaming, and his natural impetuosity, which showed itself by an emulation of high standards in his military duties, degenerated into recklessness before the baccarat-table. At the end of eighteen months, play, and an expensive *liaison* with an actress, had absorbed half his fortune, and his paternal inheritance had been mortgaged as well. The actress was a favorite in certain circles and had been very much courted; and this other form of rivalry, springing from the glitter of the foot-lights, added so much the more fuel to the prodigalities of the inflammable young officer.

Affairs were in this situation when, immediately after Henri's triumph at the race-track, a bettor on the opposite side paid one of his wagers by offering to the victor a grand dinner at the Frères-Provençaux.

CHAPTER II

BIRDS OF PREY



HE hero of the night was seated at the middle of one side of the table, in the place of honor. For his *vis-à-vis* he had his lively friend Fanny Dorville, star of the Palais Royal, while at his right sat Héloïse Virot, the “first old woman,” or duenna, of the same theatre, whose well-known jests and eccentricities added their own piquancy to gay life in Paris. The two artists, being compelled to appear in the after-piece at their theatre that evening, had come to the dinner made up and in full stage costume, ready to appear behind the footlights at the summons of the call-boy.

The other guests were young men accustomed to the surroundings of the weighing-stand and the betting-room, at a time when betting had not yet become a practice of the masses; and most of them felt highly honored to rub elbows with a nobleman of ancient lineage, as was Henri de Prerolles.

Among these persons was André Desvanneaux, whose father, a churchwarden at Ste.-Clotilde, had attained a certain social prestige by his good works, and Paul Landry, in his licentiate in a large banking-

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house in Paris. The last named was the son of a ship-owner at Havre, and his character was ambitious and calculating. He cherished, under a quiet demeanor, a strong hope of being able to supply, by the rapid acquisition of a fortune, the deficiencies of his inferior birth, from which his secret vanity suffered severely. Being an expert in all games of chance, he had already accumulated, while waiting for some brilliant *coup*, enough to lead a life of comparative elegance, thus giving a certain satisfaction to his instincts. He and Henri de Prerolles never yet had played cards together, but the occasion was sure to come some day, and Paul Landry had desired it a long time.

The company, a little silent at first, was becoming somewhat more animated, when a head-waiter, correct, and full of a sense of his own importance, entered the salon, holding out before him with both hands a large tray covered with slender glasses filled with a beverage called "the cardinal's drink," composed of champagne, Bordeaux, and slices of pineapple. The method of blending these materials was a professional secret of the Frères-Provençaux.

Instantly the guests were on their feet, and Héloïse, who had been served first, proposed that they should drink the health of the Marquis, but, prompted by one of her facetious impulses, instead of lifting the glass to her own lips, she presented it to those of the waiter, and, raising her arm, compelled him to swallow the contents. Encouraged by laughter and applause, she presented to him a second glass, then a third; and

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the unhappy man drank obediently, not being able to push away the glasses without endangering the safety of the tray he carried.

Fanny Dorville interceded in vain for the victim; the inexorable duenna had already seized a fourth glass, and the final catastrophe would have been infallibly brought about, had not providence intervened in the person of the call-boy, who, thrusting his head through the half-open doorway, cried, shrilly:

“Ladies, they are about to begin!”

The two actresses hastened away, escorted by André Desvanneaux, a modern Tartufe, who, though married, was seen everywhere, as much at home behind the scenes as in church.

Coffee and liqueurs were then served in a salon adjoining the large dining-room, which gave the effect of a private club-room to this part of the restaurant.

Cigars were lighted, and conversation soon turned on feminine charms and the performances of various horses, particularly those of Franc-Comtois, the winner of the military steeplechase. This animal was one of the products of the Prérrolles stud, and was ordinary enough on flat ground, but a jumper of the first rank.

At last the clock struck the half hour after eleven, and some of the guests had already manifested their intention to depart, when Paul Landry, who had been rather silent until then, said, carelessly:

“You expect to sleep to-night in Paris, no doubt, Monsieur de Prérrolles?”

“Oh, no,” Henri replied, “I am on duty this week,

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and am obliged to return to Vincennes early in the morning. So I shall stay here until it is time for me to go."

"In that case, might we not have a game of cards?" proposed Captain Constantin Lénaïeff, military attaché to the suite of the Russian ambassador.

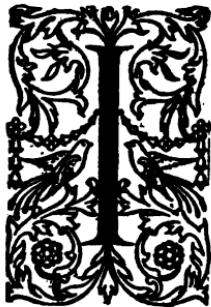
"As you please," said Henri.

This proposal decided every one to remain. The company returned to the large dining-room, which, in the mean time, had been again transformed into a gaming-hall, with the usual accessories: a frame for the tally-sheet, a metal bowl to hold rejected playing-cards set in one end of the table, and, placed at intervals around it, were tablets on which the punter registered the amount of the stakes.

On reëntering this apartment, Henri de Prerolles approached a sort of counter, and, drawing from his pocket thirty thousand francs in bank-notes, he exchanged them for their value in mother-of-pearl "chips" of different sizes, representing sums from one to five, ten, twenty-five, or a hundred louis. Paul Landry took twenty-five thousand francs' worth; Constantin Lénaïeff, fifteen thousand; the others, less fortunate or more prudent, took smaller sums; and about midnight the game began.

CHAPTER III

THE GAME



T began quietly enough, the two principal players waiting, before making any bold strokes, to see how the luck should run. The first victory was in favor of Henri, who, at the end of a hand dealt by Constantin Lénaïeff, had won about three hundred louis. Just at this moment the two women returned, accompanied by Desvanneaux.

"I had some difficulty in persuading our charming friends to return," said he; "Mademoiselle Dorville was determined that some one should escort her to her own house."

"You, perhaps, Desvanneaux," said Henri, twisting up the ends of his moustache.

"Not at all," said Fanny; "I wished Héloise to go with me. I have noticed that when I am here you always lose. I fear I have the evil eye."

"Say, rather, that you have no stomach," said Héloise. "Had you made your *début*, as I made mine, with Frédéric Lemaître in 'Thirty Years in the Life of an Actor'?"

"It certainly would not rejuvenate her," said Henri, finishing the sentence.

"Marquis, you are very impertinent," said the

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duenna, laughing. "As a penalty, you must lend me five louis."

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you!"

And, as a new hand was about to be dealt, Héloïse seated herself at one of the tables. This time Paul Landry put fifteen thousand francs in the bank.

"Will you do me the favor to cut the cards?" he asked of Fanny, who stood behind Henri's chair.

"What! in spite of my evil eye, Monsieur?"

"I do not fear that, Mademoiselle. Your eyes have always been too beautiful for one of them to change now."

Stale as was this compliment, it had the desired effect, and the young woman thrust vertically into the midst of the pack the cards he held out to her.

"Play, messieurs," said the banker.

"Messieurs and Madame," corrected Héloïse, placing her five chips before her, while Henri, at the other table, staked the six thousand francs which he had just won.

"Don't put up more than there is in the bank," objected Paul Landry, throwing a keen glance at the stakes. Having assured himself that on the opposing side to this large sum there were hardly thirty louis, he dealt the cards.

"Eight!" said he, laying down his card.

"Nine!" said Héloïse.

"Baccarat!" said Henri, throwing two court-cards into the basket.

The rake rattled on the losing table, but after the

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small stakes of the winners had been paid, the greater part of the six thousand francs passed into the hands of the banker.

Five times in succession, at the first deal, the same thing happened; and at the sixth round Héloïse won six hundred francs, and Henri found himself with no more counters.

"This is the proper moment to retire!" said the duenna, rising from the table. "Are you coming, Fanny?"

"I beg you, let us go now," murmured Mademoiselle Dorville in the ear of her lover.

Her voice was caressing and full of tender promise. The young man hesitated an instant. But to desert the game at his first loss seemed to him an act unworthy of his reputation, and, as between love and pride, the latter finally prevailed.

"I have only an hour or two more to wait. Can not you go home by yourself?" he replied to Fanny's appeal, while Héloïse exchanged her counters for tinkling coin, forgetting, no doubt, to reimburse her creditor, who, in fact, gave no thought to the matter.

Henri accompanied the two women to a coach at the door, which had been engaged by the thoughtful and obliging Desvanneaux; and, pressing tenderly the hand of his mistress, he murmured:

"Till to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" she echoed, her heart oppressed with sad forebodings.

Desvanneaux, whose wife was very jealous of him, made all haste to regain his conjugal abode.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULT



MEANWHILE, Paul Landry had begun badly, and had had some ill turns of luck; nevertheless, feeling that his fortune was about to change, he raised the stakes.

"Does any one take him up?" asked Constantin Lénæiff.

"I do," said De Prerolles, who had returned to the table.

And, seizing a pencil that lay on the card-table, he signed four cheques of twenty-five thousand francs each. Unfortunately for him, the next hand was disastrous. The stakes were increased, and the bank was broken several times, when Paul Landry, profiting by a heavy gain, doubled and redoubled the preceding stakes, and beheld mounting before him a pile of cheques and counters.

But, as often happens in such circumstances, his opponent, Henri de Prerolles, persisted in his vain battle against ill-luck, until at three o'clock in the morning, controlling his shaken nerves and throwing down his cards, without any apparent anger, he said:

"Will you tell me, gentlemen, how much I owe you?"

After all accounts had been reckoned, he saw that

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he had lost two hundred and ninety thousand francs, of which two hundred and sixty thousand in cheques belonged to Paul Landry, and the thirty thousand francs' balance to the bank.

"Monsieur de Prerolles," said Paul Landry, hypocritically, "I am ashamed to win such a sum from you. If you wish to seek your revenge at some other game, I am entirely at your service."

The Marquis looked at the clock, calculated that he had still half an hour to spare, and, not more for the purpose of "playing to the gallery" than in the hope of reducing the enormous sum of his indebtedness, he replied:

"Will it be agreeable to you to play six hands of bezique?"

"Certainly, Monsieur. How much a point?"

"Ten francs, if that is not too much."

"Not at all! I was about to propose that amount myself."

A quick movement of curiosity ran through the assembly, and a circle was formed around the two opponents in this exciting match.

Every one knows that bezique is played with four packs of cards, and that the number of points may be continued indefinitely. The essential thing is to win at least one thousand points at the end of each hand; unless a player does this he is said to "pass the Rubicon," becoming twice a loser—that is, the victor adds to his own score the points lost by his adversary. Good play, therefore, consists largely in avoiding the "Rubicon" and in remaining master of

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

the game to the last trick, in order to force one's adversary over the "Rubicon," if he stands in danger of it.

The first two hands were lost by Landry, who, having each time approached the "Rubicon," succeeded in avoiding it only by the greatest skill and prudence. Immediately his opponent, still believing that good luck must return to him, began to neglect the smaller points in order to make telling strokes, but he became stranded at the very port of success, as it were; so that, deducting the amount of his first winning, he found at the end of the fifth hand that he had lost six thousand points.

Notwithstanding his wonderful self-control, it was not without difficulty that the young officer preserved a calm demeanor under the severe blows dealt him by Fortune. Paul Landry, always master of himself, lowered his eyes that their expression of greedy and merciless joy should not be seen.

The nearer the game drew to its conclusion, the closer pressed the circle of spectators, and in the midst of a profound silence the last hand began.

Favored from the beginning with the luckiest cards, followed by the most fortunate returns, Paul Landry scored successively "forty, bezique," five hundred and fifteen hundred. He lacked two cards to make the highest point possible, but Henri, by their absence from his own hand, could measure the peril that menaced him. So, surveying the number of cards that remained in stock, he guarded carefully three aces of trumps which might help him to avert disaster. But, playing

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the only ace that would allow him to score again, Paul Landry announced coldly, laying on the table four queens of spades and four knaves of diamonds:

“Four thousand five hundred!”

This was the final stroke. The last hand had wiped out, by eight thousand points, the possessions of Landry’s adversary. The former losses of the unfortunate Marquis were now augmented by one hundred and forty thousand francs.

Henri became very pale, but, summoning all his pride to meet the glances of the curious, he arose, rang a bell, and called for a pen and a sheet of stamped paper. Then, turning to Paul Landry, he said, calmly:

“Monsieur, I owe you four hundred thousand francs. Debts of honor are payable within twenty-four hours, but in order to realize this sum, I shall require more time. How long a delay will you grant me?”

“As long as you wish, Monsieur.”

“I thank you. I ask a month.”

A waiter appeared, bringing the pen and paper.

“Oh, your word will be sufficient for me,” said Landry.

“Pardon me!” said the Marquis. “One never knows what may happen. I insist that you shall accept a formal acknowledgment of the debt.”

And he wrote:

“I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I owe to Monsieur Paul Landry the sum of four hundred thousand francs, which I promise to pay in thirty days, counting from this date.”

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He dated, signed, and folded the paper, and handed it to Paul Landry. Then, glancing at the clock, whose hands pointed to a quarter before four, he said:

"Permit me to take leave of you, gentlemen. I have barely time to reach Vincennes before roll-call."

He lighted a cigar, saluted the astonished assembly with perfect coolness, slowly descended the stairs, and jumped into his carriage, the *chasseur* of the restaurant holding open the door for him.

"To Vincennes!" he cried to the coachman; "and drive like the devil!"

CHAPTER V

A DESPERATE RESOLUTION



HE chimneys and roofs of the tall houses along the boulevards stood out sharp and clear in the light of the rising sun. Here and there squads of street-cleaners appeared, and belated hucksters urged their horses toward the markets; but except for these, the streets were deserted, and the little coupé that carried Cæsar and his misfortunes rolled rapidly toward the Barrière du Trône.

With all the coach-windows lowered, in order to admit the fresh morning air, the energetic nobleman, buffeted by ill-luck, suddenly raised his head and steadily looked in the face the consequences of his defeat. He, too, could say that all was lost save honor; and already, from the depths of his virile soul, sprang the only resolution that seemed to him worthy of himself.

When he entered his own rooms in order to dress, his mind was made up; and although, during the military exercises that morning, his commands were more abrupt than usual, no one would have suspected that his mind was preoccupied by any unusual trouble.

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He decided to call upon his superior officer that afternoon to request from him authorization to seek an exchange for Africa. Then he went quietly to breakfast at the *pension* of the officers of his own rank, who, observing his calm demeanor, in contrast to their own, knew that he must be unaware of the important news just published in the morning journals. General de Lorencez, after an unsuccessful attack upon the walls of Puebla, had been compelled to retreat toward Orizaba, and to intrench there while waiting for reënforcements.

This military event awakened the liveliest discussions, and in the midst of the repast a quartermaster entered to announce the reply to the report, first presenting his open register to the senior lieutenant.

"Ah! By Jove, fellows! what luck!" cried that officer, joyously.

"What is it?" demanded the others in chorus.

"Listen to this!" And he read aloud: "'General Order: An expedition corps, composed of two divisions of infantry, under the command of General Forey, is in process of forming, in order to be sent to Mexico on urgent business. The brigade of the advance guard will be composed of the First Regiment of Zouaves and the Eighteenth Battalion of infantry. As soon as these companies shall be prepared for war, this battalion will proceed by the shortest route to Toulon; thence they will embark aboard the *Imperial* on the twenty-sixth day of June next.'"

A rousing cheer drowned the end of the reading of this bulletin, the tenor of which gave to Henri's aspira-

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tions an immediate and more advantageous prospect: immediate, because, as his company was the first to march, he was assured of not remaining longer at the garrison; more advantageous, because the dangers of a foreign expedition opened a much larger field for his chances of promotion.

Consequently, less than a month remained to him in which to settle his indebtedness. After the reading of the bulletin, he asked one of his brother officers to take his place until evening, caught the first train to town, and, alighting at the Bastille, went directly to the Hôtel de Montgeron, where he had temporary quarters whenever he chose to use them.

"Is the Duke at home?" he inquired of the Swiss.

Receiving an affirmative reply, he crossed the courtyard, and was soon announced to his brother-in-law, the noble proprietor of La Sarthe, deputy of the Legitimist opposition to the Corps Législatif of the Empire.

The Duc de Montgeron listened in silence to his relative's explanation of his situation. When the recital was finished, without uttering a syllable he opened a drawer, drew out a legal paper, and handed it to Henri, saying:

"This is my marriage contract. Read it, and you will see that I have had, from the head of my family, three hundred and fifteen thousand livres income. I do not say this to you in order to contrast my riches with your ruin, but only to prove to you that I was perfectly well able to marry your sister even had she possessed no *dot*. That *dot* yields seven hundred and

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fifteen thousand francs' income, at three per cent. We were married under the law of community of goods, which greatly simplifies matters when husband and wife have, as have Jeanne and myself, but one heart and one way of looking at things. To consult her would be, perhaps, to injure her. To-morrow I will sell the necessary stock, and ere the end of the week Monsieur Durand, your notary and ours, shall hold at your disposal the amount of the sum you lost last night."

The blood rose to the cheeks of the young officer.

"I—I—" he stammered, pressing convulsively the hands of his brother-in-law. "Shall I let you pay the ransom for my madness and folly? Shall I a second time despoil my sister, already robbed by me of one half her rightful share? I should die of shame! Or, rather—wait a moment! Let us reverse our situations for an instant, and if you will swear to me that, were you in my place, you would accept—Ah, you see! You hesitate as much now as you hesitated little a moment ago in your simple and cordial burst of generosity. Consequently, I refuse!"

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"To sell Prérrolles immediately—to-day, if possible. This determination troubles you because of the grief it will cause Jeanne. It will grieve me, too. And the courage to tell this to her is the only effort to which my strength is unequal. Only you can tell it in such a way as to soften the blow——"

"I will try to do it," said the Duke.

"I thank you! As to the personal belongings and

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the family portraits, their place is at Montgeron, is it not?"

"That is understood. Now, one word more, Henri."

"Speak!"

"Have you not another embarrassment to settle?"

"I have indeed, and the sooner the better. Unhappily——"

"You have not enough money," finished the Duke. "I have received this morning twenty-five thousand francs' rent from my farms. Will you allow me to lend them to you?"

"To be repaid from the price of the sale? Very willingly, this time."

And he placed in an envelope the notes handed him by his brother-in-law.

"This is the last will and testament of love," said the Marquis, as he departed, to give the necessary instructions to his notary.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAREWELL



IS debts were easily reckoned. He owed eight hundred thousand francs to the Crédit Foncier; four hundred thousand to Paul Landry; more than one hundred thousand to various jewellers and shopkeepers; twenty-five thousand to the Duc de Montgeron. It was necessary to sell the château and the property at one million four hundred thousand francs, and the posters advertising the sale must be displayed without delay.

Then he must say farewell to Fanny Dorville. Nothing should disturb a sensible mind; the man who, with so much resolution, deprives himself of his patrimonial estates should not meet less bravely the separation imposed by necessity.

As soon as Henri appeared in Fanny's boudoir, she divined that her presentiments of the previous night had not deceived her.

"You have lost heavily?" she asked.

"Very heavily," he replied, kissing her brow.

"And it was my fault!" she cried. "I brought you bad luck, and that wretch of a Landry knew well

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what he was about when he made me cut the cards that brought you misfortune!"

"No, no, my dear—listen! The only one in fault was I, who allowed myself, through false pride, to be persuaded that I should not seem to fear him."

"Fear *him*—a professional gambler, who lives one knows not how! Nonsense! It is as if one should fight a duel with a fencing-master."

"What do you wish, my dear? The evil is done—and it is so great——"

"That you have not the means to pay the sum? Oh, but wait a moment."

And taking up a casket containing a superb collar of pearls, she said:

"This is worth fourteen thousand francs. You may well take them from me, since it was you that gave them to me."

No doubt, she had read De Musset, and this action was perhaps a reflection of that of Marion, but the movement was sincere. Something of the stern pride of this other Rolla was stirred; a sob swelled his bosom, and two tears—those tears that rise to a soldier's eyes in the presence of nobility and goodness—fell from his eyes upon the hair of the poor girl.

"I have not come to that yet," he said, after a short silence. "But we must part——"

"You are about to marry?" she cried.

"Oh, no!"

"Ah, so much the better!"

In a few words he told her of his approaching de-

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parture, and said that he must devote all his remaining time to the details of the mobilization of troops.

"So—it is all over!" said Fanny, sadly. "But fear nothing! I have courage, and even if I have the evil eye at play, I know of something that brings success in war. Will you accept a little fetich from me?"

"Yes, but you persist in trying to give me something," he said, placing on a table the sealed envelope he had brought.

"How good you are!" she murmured. "Now promise me one thing: let us dine together once more. Not at the Provençaux, however. Oh, heavens! no! At the Café Anglais—where we dined before the play the first time we——"

The entrance of Héloïse cut short the allusion to a memory of autumn.

"Ah, it is you," said Fanny nervously. "You come *à propos*."

"Is there a row in the family?" inquired Héloïse.

"As if there could be!"

"What is it, then?"

"You see Henri, do you not?"

"Well, yes, I do, certainly. What then?"

"Then look at him long and well, for you will not see him again in many a day. He is going to Mexico!"

"To exploit a mine?"

"Yes, Héloïse," the officer replied, "a mine that will make the walls of Puebla totter."

"In that case, good luck, my General!" said the duenna, presenting arms with her umbrella.

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Fanny could not repress a smile in spite of her tears. Her lover seized this moment to withdraw from her arms and reach the stairs.

“And now, Marquis de Prérrolles, go forth to battle!” cried the old actress to him over the banisters, with the air of an artist who knows her proper cue.

CHAPTER VII

THE VOW



OTWITHSTANDING the desire expressed by his mistress, Henri firmly decided not to repeat that farewell scene.

The matter that concerned him most was the wish not to depart without having freed himself wholly from his debt to Paul Landry. Fortunately, because of a kindly interest, as well as on account of the guaranty of the Duc de Montgeron, a rich friend consented to advance the sum; so that, one week before the day appointed for payment, the losing player was able to withdraw his signature from the hands of his greedy creditor.

Relieved from this anxiety, Henri had asked, the night before the day set for departure, for leave of absence for several hours, in order to visit for the last time a spot very dear to him, upon whose walls placards now hung, announcing the sale of the property to take place on the following morning.

No one received warning of this visit *in extremis* save the steward, who awaited his master before the gates of the château, the doors and windows of which had been flung wide open.

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At the appointed hour the visitor appeared at the end of the avenue, advancing with a firm step between two hedges bordered with poplars, behind which several brood-mares, standing knee-deep in the rich grass, suckled their foal.

The threshold of the gate crossed, master and man skirted the lawn, traversed the garden, laid out in the French fashion, and, side by side, without exchanging a word, mounted the steps of the mansion. Entering the main hall, the Marquis, whose heart was full of memories of his childhood, stopped a long time to regard alternately the two suites of apartments that joined the vestibule to the two opposite wings. Making a sign to his companion not to follow him, Henri then entered the vast gallery, wherein hung long rows of the portraits of his ancestors; and there, baring his head before that of the Marshal of France whose name he bore, he vowed simply, without excitement, and in a low tone, either to vanquish the enemy or to add, after the manner of his forbears, a glorious page to his family's history.

The object of his pilgrimage having thus been accomplished, the Marquis ordered the steward to see that all the portraits were sent to the Château de Montgeron; then, after pressing his hand in farewell, he returned to the station by the road whence he had come, avoiding the village in order to escape the curious eyes of the peasantry.

CHAPTER VIII

IN SEARCH OF GLORY



HE next morning the 18th battalion of *chasseurs*, in dress uniform, with knapsacks on their backs and fully armed, awaited in the Gare de Lyon the moment to board the train destined to transport them to the coast.

At a trumpet-call this movement was executed in silence, and in perfect order; and only after all the men were installed did the functionaries who kept the crowd in order take their own places in the carriages, leaving a throng of relatives and friends jostling one another upon the quay.

Fanny Dorville and her friend the duenna tried in vain to reach the compartment wherein Henri had his place, already in marching order; the presence of the Duc and the Duchesse de Montgeron prevented the two women from approaching him. Nevertheless, at the moment when the train began to move slowly out of the station, an employé found the means to slip into the hands of the Marquis a small packet containing the little fetich which his mistress had kept for him. It was a medallion of the Holy Virgin, which

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had been blessed at Nôtre-Dame des-Victoires, and it was attached to a long gold chain.

Thirty-six hours later, on the evening of the 26th of June, the battalion embarked aboard the *Imperial*, which, with steam up, was due to leave the Toulon roadstead at daybreak. At the moment of getting under weigh, the officer in charge of the luggage, who was the last to leave the shore, brought several despatches aboard the ship, and handed to Lieutenant de Prérrolles a telegram, which had been received the evening before at the quay.

The Marquis opened it and read: "Château and lands sold for 1,450,000 francs. Everything paid, 16,000 francs remain disposable."

"That is to say," thought the officer, sadly, "I have my pay and barely three thousand francs' income!"

Leaning both elbows upon the taffrail, he gazed long at the shores of France, which appeared to fly toward the horizon; then, brusquely turning his eyes to the quarters filled with the strong figures and manly faces of the young foot-soldiers of the 18th battalion, he said to himself that among such men, under whatever skies or at whatever distance, one found his country—glancing aloft where floated above his head the folds of his flag.

CHAPTER IX

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WENTY-THREE years after the events already recorded, on a cold afternoon in February, the Bois de Boulogne appeared to be draped in a Siberian mantle rarely seen at that season. A deep and clinging covering of snow hid the ground, and the prolonged freezing of the lakes gave absolute guaranty of their solidity.

A red sun, drowned in mist, threw a mild radiance over the landscape, and many pedestrians stamped their feet around the borders of the lake belonging to the Skaters' Club, and watched the hosts of pretty women descending from their carriages, delighted at the opportunity afforded them, by this return of winter, to engage in their favorite exercise.

Received on her arrival by one of the attendants posted at the entrance, each of the fair skaters entered in turn a small building reserved for ladies, whence she soon came forth in full skating array, ready to risk herself on the ice, either alone or guided by the hand of some expert cavalier.

Here and there, around the enclosure, large garden-seats, shaped like sentry-boxes, were reserved for the

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mothers and sisters of the members of the club, so that they could observe, from a comfortable shelter, the evolutions of those in whom they were interested.

Within two of these nooks, side by side, sat the Duchesse de Montgeron, president, and the Comtesse Desvanneaux, vice-president of the Charity Orphan Asylum; the latter had come to look on at the first essay on the ice of her daughter, Madame de Thomery; the former, to judge the skill of her brother, General the Marquis de Prerolles, pastmaster in all exercises of strength and skill.

At forty-five years of age, the young General had preserved the same grace and slenderness that had distinguished him when he had first donned the elegant tunic of an officer of *chasseurs*. His hair, cut rather short, had become slightly gray on his temples, but his jaunty moustache and well-trimmed beard were as yet innocent of a single silver thread. The same energy shone in his eyes, the same sonority rang in his voice, which had become slightly more brusque and authoritative from his long-continued habit of command.

In a small round hat, with his hands in the pockets of an outing-jacket, matching his knickerbockers in color, he strolled to and fro near his sister, now encouraging Madame de Thomery, hesitating on the arm of her instructor, now describing scientific flourishes on the ice, in rivalry against the crosses dashed off by Madame de Lisieux and Madame de Nointel—two other patronesses of the orphanage—the most renowned among all the fashionable skaters. This sort of

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tourney naturally attracted all eyes, and the idlers along the outer walks had climbed upon the paling in order to gain a better view of the evolutions, when suddenly a spectacle of another kind called their attention to the entrance-gate in their rear.

Passing through the Porte Dauphine, and driven by a young woman enveloped in furs, advanced swiftly, over the crisp snow, a light American sleigh, to which was harnessed a magnificent trotter, whose head and shoulders emerged, as from an aureole, through that flexible, circular ornament which the Russians call the *douga*.

Having passed the last turn of the path, the driver slackened her grasp, and the horse stopped short before the entrance. His owner, throwing the reins to a groom perched up behind, sprang lightly to the ground amid a crowd of curious observers, whose interest was greatly enhanced by the sight of the odd-looking vehicle.

The late-comer presented her card of invitation to the proper functionary, and went across the enclosure toward the ladies' salon.

"Ah! there is Zibeline!" cried Madame Desvanneaux, with an affected air. "Do you know her?" she inquired of the Duchesse de Montgeron.

"Not yet," the Duchess replied. "She did not arrive in Paris until the end of spring, just at the time I was leaving town for the seashore. But I know that she says her real name is Mademoiselle de Vermont, and that she was born in Louisiana, of an old French family that emigrated to the North, and recently be-

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came rich in the fur trade—from which circumstance Madame de Nointel has wittily named her ‘Zibeline.’ I know also that she is an orphan, that she has an enormous fortune, and has successively refused, I believe, all pretenders who have thus far aspired to her hand.”

“Yes—gamblers, and fortune-hunters, in whose eyes her millions excuse all her eccentricities.”

“Do I understand that she has been presented to you?” asked the Duchess, surprised.

“Well, yes—by the old Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, one of her so-called cousins—rather distant, I fancy! But the independent airs of this young lady, and her absolute lack of any respectable chaperon, have decided me to break off any relations that might throw discredit on our patriarchal house,” Madame Desvaneaux replied volubly, as ready to cross herself as if she had been speaking of the devil!

The Duchess could not repress a smile, knowing perfectly that her interlocutor had been among the first to demand for her son the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont!

During this dialogue, the subject of it had had time to cast aside her fur cloak, to fasten upon her slender, arched feet, clad in dainty, laced boots, a pair of steel skates, with tangent blades, and without either grooves or straps, and to dart out upon this miniature sheet of water with the agility of a person accustomed to skating on the great lakes of America.

She was a brunette, with crisply waving hair, a small head, well-set, and deep yet brilliant eyes beneath arched and slightly meeting brows. Her com-

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plexion was pale, and her little aquiline nose showed thin, dilating nostrils. Her rosy lips, whose corners drooped slightly, revealed dazzling teeth, and her whole physiognomy expressed an air of haughty disdain, somewhat softened by her natural elegance.

Her cloth costume, which displayed to advantage her slender waist and graceful bust, was of simple but elegant cut, and was adorned with superb trimmings of black fox, which matched her toque and a little satin-lined muff, which from time to time she raised to her cheek to ward off the biting wind.

Perhaps her skirt was a shade too short, revealing in its undulations a trifle too much of the dainty hose; but the revelation was so shapely it would have been a pity to conceal it!

"Very bad form!" murmured Madame Desvaneaux.

"But one can not come to a place like this in a skirt with a train," was the more charitable thought of the Duchess.

Meantime the aforesaid tournament went on in the centre of the sheet of ice, and Zibeline, without mingling with the other skaters, contented herself with skirting the borders of the lake, rapidly designing a chain of pierced hearts on the smooth surface, an appropriate symbol of her own superiority.

Annoyed to see himself eclipsed by a stranger, the General threw a challenging glance in her direction, and, striking out vigorously in a straight line, he sped swiftly toward the other end of the lake.

Stung to the quick by his glance, Mademoiselle de

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Vermont darted after him, passed him halfway along the course, and, wheeling around with a wide, outward curve, her body swaying low, she allowed him to pass before her, maintaining an attitude which her antagonist might interpret as a salute, courteous or ironic, as he chose.

By this time the crowd was gradually diminishing. The daylight was waning, and a continued sound of closing gates announced the retreat of the gay world toward Paris.

Zibeline alone, taking advantage of the free field, lingered a few moments to execute some evolutions in the deepening twilight, looking like the heroines in the old ballads, half-visible, through the mists, to the vivid imagination of the Scottish bards.

Henri de Prerolles had entered his sister's carriage, in company with Madame Desvanneaux and Madame Thomery, and during the drive home, these two gentle dames—for the daughter was worthy of the mother—did not fail to sneer at the fair stranger, dilating particularly upon the impropriety of the challenging salute she had given to the General, with whom she was unacquainted.

“But my brother could hardly request his seconds to call upon her for that!” laughingly said the Duchess who, it seemed, had decided to defend the accused one in all attacks made upon her.

“Look! Here she comes! She is passing us again. One would think she was deliberately trying to do it!” exclaimed Madame Desvanneaux, just before their carriage reached the Arc de Triomphe.

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Zibeline's sleigh, which had glided swiftly, and without hindrance, along the unfrequented track used chiefly by equestrians, had indeed overtaken the Duchess's carriage. Turning abruptly to the left, it entered the open gateway belonging to one of the corner houses of the Rond-Point de l'Etoile.

"Decidedly, the young lady is very fond of posing," said the General, with a shrug, and, settling himself in his corner, he turned his thoughts elsewhere.

Having deposited her two friends at their own door, the Duchess ordered the coachman to take her home, and at the foot of the steps she said to her brother:

"Will you dine with us to-night?"

"No, not to-night," he replied, "but we shall meet at the theatre."

And, crossing the court, he entered his little bachelor apartment, which he had occupied from time to time since the days when he was only a sub-lieutenant.

CHAPTER X

THE GENERAL DE PRÉROLLES



HE sub-lieutenant had kept his word, and the progress of his career deserves detailed mention.

He was a lieutenant at the taking of Puebla, where he was first to mount in the assault of the Convent of Guadalupita. Captain of the Third Zouaves after the siege of Oajaca, he had exercised, during the rest of the expedition, command over a mounted company, whose duty was to maintain communications between the various columns, continuing, at the same time, their operations in the Michoacan.

This confidential mission, requiring as much power to take the initiative as it demanded a cool head, gave the Marquis opportunity to execute, with rapidity and decision, several master-strokes, which, in the following circumstances, won for him the cross of the Legion of Honor.

The most audacious of the guerrillas who had devastated this fertile country was a chief called Regulas. He pillaged the farms, stopped railway trains, boldly demanding ransom from captives from the municipal

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governments of large towns. He was continually active, and always inaccessible.

Warned by his scouts that the followers of this villain menaced the town of Pazcuaro, Captain de Prérolles prepared himself eagerly to meet them. He overtook them in a night march, and fell upon them unexpectedly, just as they were holding up the diligence from Morélia to Guadalajara. His plans had been so well laid that not a man escaped. What was the surprise of the French officer to find, among the travellers, delivered by himself from certain death, Paul Landry, the principal cause of his ruin, who the chances of war now laid under obligations to him!

"This is my revenge," said the Captain, simply, to Landry, attempting to avoid his thanks, and returning to him intact his luggage, of which the *chinacos* had not had time to divide the contents.

Reconciled in Algiers with his regiment, Henri de Prérolles did not again quit the province of Constantine except to serve in the army of the Rhine, as chief of battalion in the line, until the promotions which followed the declaration of war in 1870. Officer of the Legion of Honor for his gallantry at Gravelotte and at St. Privat, and assigned for his ability to the employ of the chief of corps, he had just been called upon to assume command of his former battalion of *chasseurs*, when the disastrous surrender of Metz left him a prisoner of war in the hands of the Germans.

Profoundly affected by this disaster, but learning that the conflict still continued, he refused to avail himself of the offer of comparative freedom in the city,

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provided he would give his parole not to attempt to escape. He was therefore conducted to a distant fortress near the Russian frontier, and handed over to the captain of the *landwehr*, who received instructions to keep a strict guard over him.

This officer belonged to the engineering corps, and directed, at the same time, the work of repairs within the citadel, in charge of a civilian contractor.

Taking into consideration the rank of his prisoner, the captain permitted the Marquis to have with him his orderly, an Alsatian, who twice a day brought from the inn his chief's repasts. This functionary had permission also, from ten o'clock in the morning until sunset, to promenade in the court under the eye of the sentinel on guard at the entrance. At five o'clock in the evening, the officer of the *landwehr* politely shut up his guest in his prison, double-locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and appeared no more until the next morning.

The middle of November had arrived; heavy snows had already fallen, and the prisoner amused himself by constructing fortifications of snow—a work which his amiable jailer followed with a professional interest, giving him advice regarding modifications proper to introduce in the defense of certain places, himself putting a finger in the pie in support of his demonstration.

This sort of amusement was followed so industriously that in a few days a kind of rampart was erected in front of the casemate of the fortress, behind which, by stooping a little, a man of ordinary height could easily creep along unseen by the sentinel.

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While pursuing his work of modelling in snow, the Marquis de Prérrolles had taken care to observe the goings and comings of the civilian contractor, who, wearing a tall hat and attired in a black redingote, departed regularly every day at half-past four, carrying a large portfolio under his arm. To procure such a costume and similar accessories for himself was easy, since the Marquis's orderly spoke the language of the country; and to introduce them into the prison, hidden in a basket of provisions, was not difficult to accomplish.

To execute all this required only four trips to and fro. At the end of forty-eight hours, the necessary aids to escape were in the proper place, hidden under the snow behind the bastion. More than this, the clever Alsatian had slipped a topographical map of the surrounding country between two of the plates in the basket. According to the scale, the frontier was distant only about five leagues, across open country, sparsely settled with occasional farms which would serve as resting-places.

By that time, the plan of escape was drawn up. Upon the day fixed for his flight, the Marquis assumed his disguise, rolled up his own uniform to look like a man asleep in his bed, lying after the fashion of a sleeping soldier; and pleading a slight illness as an excuse for not dining that evening, and, not without emotion, curled himself up behind the snowy intrenchment which his jailer himself had helped to fashion. That worthy man, only too glad to be able to rejoin his *liebe frau* a little earlier than usual, peeped through

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the half-open door of the prisoner's room and threw a glance at the little cot-bed.

"Good-night, Commander!" said the honest fellow, in a gentle voice.

Then he double-locked the door, according to custom, and disappeared whistling a national air. A quarter of an hour later the contractor left the place, and as soon as the functionary who had seen him depart was relieved by another, the prisoner left his hiding-place, crossed the drawbridge in his turn, simulating the gait of his twin, and, without any hindrance, rejoined his orderly at the place agreed upon. The trick was played!

A matter of twenty kilometres was a mere trifle for infantry troopers. They walked as lightly as gymnasts, under a clear sky, through the fields, guided by the lights in the farmhouses, and at nine o'clock, having passed the frontier, they stumbled upon a post of Cossacks ambuscaded behind a hedge!

Unfortunately, at that time the Franco-Russian alliance was still in embryo, and an agreement between the two neighboring States interdicted all passage to Frenchmen escaping from the hands of their conquerors. The two deserters were therefore conducted to the major of the nearest garrison, who alone had the right to question them.

As soon as they were in his presence, Henri could not restrain a start of surprise, for he recognized Constantin Lénaïeff, one of his adversaries on the fatal night of the Frères-Provençaux.

"Who are you?" demanded the Major, brusquely.

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"A dealer in Belgian cattle, purveyor to the German intendant," hazarded the prisoner, who had his reply all prepared.

"You—nonsense! You are a French officer; that is plain enough to be seen, in spite of your disguise."

The Major advanced a step in order to examine the prisoner more closely.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, "I can not be mistaken——"

He made a sign to his soldiers to retire, then, turning to Henri, he said:

"You are the Marquis de Prérolles!" and he extended his hand cordially to the former companion of his pleasures.

In a few words Henri explained to him the situation.

"My fate is in your hands," he concluded. "Decide it!"

"You are too good a player at this game not to win it," Lénaïeff replied, "and I am not a Paul Landry, to dispute it with you. Here is a letter of safe-conduct made out in due form; write upon it any name you choose. As for myself, I regard you absolutely as a Belgian citizen, and I shall make no report of this occurrence. Only, let me warn you, as a matter of prudence, you would do well not to linger in this territory, and if you need money——"

"I thank you!" replied the nobleman, quickly, declining with his customary proud courtesy. "But I never shall forget the service you have rendered me!"

A few moments later, the two travellers drove away

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in a carriage toward the nearest railway, in order to reenter France by way of Vienna and Turin.

They passed the Austrian and Italian frontiers without difficulty; but at the station at Modena a too-zealous detective of the French police, struck with the Alsatian accent of the orderly, immediately decided that they were two Prussian spies, and refused to allow them to proceed, since they could show him no passports.

"Passports!" cried Henri de Prerolles, accompanying his exclamation with the most Parisian oath that ever had reverberated from the Rue Laffitte to the Madeleine.

"Here is my passport!" he added, drawing from his pocket his officer's cross, which he had taken good care not to allow to become a souvenir in the hands of his jailer. "And if that does not satisfy you, give me a pen."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized a pen and wrote out the following telegram:

"DEPUTY OF WAR, TOURS:

"Escaped from prisons of the enemy, I demand admittance to France, and official duties suitable to my rank, that I may coöperate in the national defence.

"DE PREROLLES, Commandant."

He handed the paper to the police agent, saying: "Do me the favor to forward this despatch with the utmost expedition."

As soon as the agent had glanced at the message, he swept a profound salute. "Pass on, Commandant," said he, in a tone of great respect.

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Promoted to a higher rank, and appointed commander of a regiment of foot, the Lieutenant-Colonel de Prerolles rejoined the army of Chanzy, which, having known him a long time, assigned to him the duties of a brigadier-general, and instructed him to cover his retreat from the Loire on the Sarthe.

In the ensuing series of daily combats, the auxiliary General performed all that his chief expected of him, from Orléans to the battle of Maus, where, in the thick of the fight, a shell struck him in the breast. It is necessary to say that on the evening before he had noticed that the little medallion which had been given to him by Fanny Dorville, worn from its chain by friction, had disappeared from his neck. Scoffing comrades smiled at the coincidence; the more credulous looked grave.

The wound was serious, for, transported to the Château de Montgeron, a few leagues distant, the Marquis was compelled to remain there six months before he was in fit condition to rejoin his command. Toward the end of his convalescence, in June, 1871, the brother and sister resolved to make a pious pilgrimage to the cradle of their ancestors.

Exactly nine years had elapsed since the castle and lands had been sold at auction and fallen into the possession of a company of speculators, who had divided it and resold it to various purchasers. Only the farm of Valpendant, with a house of ancient and vast construction, built in the time of Philippe-Auguste, remained to an old tenant, with his dependencies and his primitive methods of agriculture.

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Leaving the train at the Beaumont tunnel, the two travellers made their way along a road which crosses the high plateau that separates the forest of Carnelle from the forest of the Ile-d'Adam, whence one can discern the steeple of Prérrolles rising above the banks of the Oise.

From this culminating point they beheld the château transformed into a factory, the park cut up into country-seats, the fields turned into market-gardens! With profound sadness the brother and the sister met each other's glance, and their eyes filled with tears, as if they stood before a tomb on All Souls' Day.

"No expiation is possible," said Henri to Jeanne, pressing her hand convulsively. "I must go—I must move on forever and ever, like the Wandering Jew."

Thanks to the influence of the Duke of Montgeron, whose faithful constituents had sent him to the National Assembly, his brother-in-law had been transferred to a regiment of zouaves, of which he became colonel in 1875, whereupon he decided to remain in Africa during the rest of his life.

But Tunis and Tonquin opened new horizons to him. Landing as a brigadier-general at Haiphong, he was about to assume, at Bac-Ninh, his third star, when the Minister of War, examining the brilliant record of this officer who, since 1862, never had ceased his service to his country, called him to take command of one of the infantry divisions of the army of Paris, a place which he had occupied only a few months before the events related in the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XI

EUGÉNIE GONTIER



EW salons in Paris have so imposing an air as the *oyer* of the dramatic artists of the Comédie Française, a rectangular room of fine proportions, whose walls are adorned with portraits of great actors, representing the principal illustrations of the plays that have been the glory of the house: Mademoiselle Duclos, by Largillièr; Fleury, by Gérard; Molière crowned, by Mignard; Baron, by De Troy, and many others.

At the left of the entrance, separated by a large, high mirror which faced the fireplace, two other canvases, signed by Geffroy, represent the *oyer* itself, in costumes of the classic repertoire, the greater part of the eminent modern *sociétaires*, colleagues and contemporaries of the great painter.

Between the windows, two pedestals, surmounted by busts of Mademoiselle Clairon and Mademoiselle Dangeville, stood, one on each side of the great regulator—made by Robin, clockmaker to the king—which dominated the bust of Molière—after Houdon—seeming to keep guard over all this gathering of artistic glory.

Opposite this group, hanging above a large table of

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finely chiselled iron, were two precious autographs under glass: a brevet of pension, dated 1682, signed *Louis* and countersigned *Colbert*; an act of notary, dated 1670, bearing the signature of Molière, the master of the house.

Disposed about the room were sofas, armchairs, and *tête-à-tête* seats in oak, covered with stamped green velvet.

Here, at the first representations of new plays, or at important revivals of old ones, flocked literary notables and the regular frequenters of the theatre, eager to compliment the performers; here, those favored strangers who have the proper introduction, and who wish to see the place at close range, are graciously conducted by the administrator-general or by the officer for the week.

Here it was that the Marquis de Prerolles appeared in the evening after his experience at the skating-pond. He had dressed, and had dined in great haste at a restaurant near the theatre.

The posters announced a revival of *Adrienne Le couvreur*, with Mademoiselle Gontier in the principal rôle, in which she was to appear for the first time.

Eugénie Gontier was, it was said, the natural daughter of a great foreign lord, who had bequeathed to her a certain amount of money. Therefore, she had chosen the theatrical life less from necessity than from inclination.

She was distinguished in presence, a great favorite with the public, and had a wide circle of friends, among whom a rich banker, the Baron de Samoreau, greatly devoted to her, had made for her investments suffi-

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ciently profitable to enable her to occupy a mansion of her own, and to open a salon which became a favorite rendezvous with many persons distinguished in artistic, financial, and even political circles. Talent being the guaranty of good companionship, this salon became much frequented, and Général de Prerolles had become one of its most assiduous visitors.

The first act had begun. Although the charming artist was not to appear until the second act, she had already descended from her dressing-room, and, finding herself alone in the greenroom, was putting a final touch to her coiffure before the mirror when the General entered.

He kissed her hand gallantly, and both seated themselves in a retired corner between the fireplace and the window.

"I thank you for coming so early," said Eugénie. "I wished very much to see you to-night, in order to draw from your eyes a little of your courage before I must face the footlights in a *rôle* so difficult and so superb."

"The fire of the footlights is not that of the enemy—above all, for you, who are so sure of winning the battle."

"Alas! does one ever know? Although at the last rehearsal Monsieur Legouvé assured me that all was perfect, look up there at that portrait of Rachel, and judge for yourself whether I have not reason to tremble at my audacity in attempting this *rôle* after such a predecessor."

"But you yourself caused this play to be revived," said Henri.

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"I did it because of you," Eugénie replied.

"Of me?"

"Yes. Am I not your Adrienne, and is not Maurice de Saxe as intrepid as you, and as prodigal as you have been? Was he not dispossessed of his duchy of Courlande, as you were of your——"

A gesture from Henri prevented her from finishing the sentence.

"Pardon me!" said she. "I had forgotten how painful to you is any reference to that matter. We will speak only of your present renown, and of the current of mutual sympathy that attracts each of us toward the other. For myself, that attraction began on the fourteenth of last July. You had just arrived at Paris, and a morning journal, in mentioning the troops, and the names of the generals who appeared at the review, related, *à propos* of your military exploits, many exciting details of your escape during the war. Do you recall the applause that greeted you when you marched past the tribunes? I saw you then for the first time, but I should have known you among a thousand! The next day——"

"The next day," Henri interrupted, "it was my turn to applaud you. I had been deprived a long time of the pleasures of the theatre, of which I am very fond, and I began by going to the Comédie Française, where you played, that night, the rôle of Hélène in *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember! I recognized you instantly, sitting in the third row in the orchestra."

"I had never seen you until then," Henri continued,

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"but that sympathetic current was soon established, from the moment you appeared until the end of the second piece. As it is my opinion that any officer is sufficiently a gentleman to have the right to love a girl of noble birth, I fell readily under the spell in which she whom you represented echoed my own sentiments. Bernard Stamply also had just returned from captivity, and the more enamored of you he became the more I pleased myself with fancying my own personality an incarnation of his, with less presumption than would be necessary for me to imagine myself the hero of which you spoke a moment ago. After the play, a friend brought me here, presented me to you——"

"And the sympathetic current did the rest!" added Eugénie Gontier, looking at him tenderly. "Since then you have consecrated to me a part of whatever time is at your disposal, and I assure you that I never have been so happy, nor have felt so flattered, in my life."

"Second act!" came the voice of the call-boy from the corridor.

"Will you return here after the fourth act?" said the actress, rising. "I shall wish to know how you find me in the great scene, and whether there is another princess de Bouillon among the audience—beware of her!"

"You know very well that there is not."

"Not yet, perhaps, but military men are so inconstant! By and by, *Maurice!*" she murmured, with a smile.

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"By and by, *Adrienne!*" Henri replied, kissing her hand.

He accompanied her to the steps that led to the stage, and, lounging along the passage that ends at the head of the grand stairway, he entered the theatre and hastened to his usual seat in the third row of the orchestra.

CHAPTER XII

RIVAL BEAUTIES



T was Tuesday, the subscription night; the auditorium was as much the more brilliant as the play was more interesting than on other nights. In one of the proscenium boxes sat the Duchesse de Montgeron with the Comtesse de Lisieux; in another the Vicomtesse de Nointel and Madame Thomery. In the first box on the left Madame Desvanneaux was to be seen, with her husband and her son, the youthful and recently rejected pretender to the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont.

Among the subscription seats in the orchestra sat the Baron de Samoreau, the notary Durand, treasurer of the Industrial Orphan Asylum; the aide-de-camp of General Lénaïeff, beside his friend the Marquis de Prérrolles. One large box, the first proscenium *loge* on the right, was still unoccupied when the curtain rose on the second act.

The *liaison* of Eugénie Gontier with the Marquis de Prérrolles was not a mystery; from the moment of her entrance upon the scene, it was evident that she "played to him," to use a phrase in theatrical parlance. Thus, after the recital of the combat undertaken in

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behalf of Adrienne by her defender—a recital which she concluded in paraphrasing these two lines:

Paraissez, Navarrois, Maures et Castillans,
Et tout ce que l'Espagne a produit de vaillants,

many opera-glasses were directed toward the spectator to whom the actress appeared to address herself, when suddenly a new object of interest changed the circuit of observation. The door of the large, right-hand box opened, and Zibeline appeared, accompanied by the Chevalier de Sainte.-Foy, an elderly gallant, carefully dressed and wearing many decorations, and whose respectable tale of years could give no occasion for malicious comment on his appearance in the *rôle* of *cavalier servente*. Having assisted his companion to remove her mantle, he profited by the instant of time she took to settle her slightly ruffled plumage before the mirror, to lay upon the railing of the box her bouquet and her lorgnette. Then he took up a position behind the chair she would occupy, ready to assist her when she might deign to sit down. His whole manner suggested a chamberlain of the ancient court in the service of a princess.

Mademoiselle de Vermont disliked bright colors, and wore on this occasion a robe of black velvet, of which the *décolletée* bodice set off the whiteness of her shoulders and her neck, the latter ornamented with a simple band of cherry-colored velvet, without jewels, as was suitable for a young girl. Long suède gloves, buttoned to the elbow, outlined her well-modelled arms, of which the upper part emerged, without

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sleeves, from lace ruffles gathered in the form of epaulets.

The men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise, and had the eyes of Madame Desvanneaux been able to throw deadly projectiles, her powerful lorgnette would have become an instrument of death for the object of her resentment.

"This morning," said the irreconcilable matron, "she showed us her ankles; this evening she allows us to see the remainder."

"I should have been very well pleased, however—" murmured young Desvanneaux, with regret.

"If you had married her, Victor," said his mother, "I should have taken full charge of her wardrobe, and should have made some decided changes, I assure you."

Perfectly indifferent to the general curiosity, Zibeline in her turn calmly reviewed the audience. After exploring the boxes with her opera-glass, she lowered it to examine the orchestra stalls, and, perceiving the Marquis, she fixed her gaze upon him. Undoubtedly she knew the reason for the particular attention which he paid to the stage, because, until the end of the act, her glance was divided alternately between the General and the actress.

As the curtain fell on this act the spectators turned their backs to the footlights, and Lénaïeff, indicating Zibeline to his friend, said in his slightly Slavonic accent:

"Who is that pretty woman, my dear Henri?"

"One of Jules Verne's personages, a product of the land of furs."

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"Do you know her?"

"Not at all. I have a prejudice against girls that are too rich. Why do you ask?"

"Because it seems to me that she looks at you very attentively."

"Indeed! I had not noticed it."

In saying this, the General—exaggerated! He had been perfectly well aware of the gaze of Mademoiselle de Vermont, but whether he still cherished a slight resentment against the lady, or whether her appearance really displeased him, he cut the conversation short and went to pay his respects to the occupants of several boxes.

Evidently Zibeline knew few persons in society, for no visitor appeared in her box. However, after the next act she made a sign to M. Durand. That gentleman rejoined the Baron de Samoreau in the corridor and took him to meet Zibeline, and a sort of council appeared to be going on in the rear of her box.

"What the deuce can she be talking about to them?" said Desvanneaux to his wife.

"A new offer of marriage, probably. They say she declares she will marry no one of lower rank than a prince, in order to complete our chagrin! Perhaps they have succeeded in finding one for her!"

The instructions that Mademoiselle de Vermont gave to the two men must have been easy to execute, for neither the notary nor the banker seemed to raise the least objection. The conversation was finished, and both gentlemen saluted her, preparing to take leave, when she said to M. Durand:

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"You understand that the meeting is for to-morrow?"

"At five o'clock," he replied.

"Very well. I will stop for you at your door at a quarter of an hour before that time."

The fourth act had begun, that scene in which Adrienne accomplishes her generous sacrifice in furnishing herself the ransom which must deliver her unfaithful lover. The rapt attention that Zibeline paid to this scene, and the slight movements of her head, showed her approval of this disinterested act. Very touching in her invocation to her "old Corneille," Mademoiselle Gontier was superb at the moment when the comedienne, knowing at last who is her rival, quotes from Racine that passage in *Phèdre* which she throws, so to speak, in the face of the patrician woman:

. . . Je sais ses perfidies,
Œnone! et ne suis point de ces femmes hardies
Qui, goûtant dans la crime une honteuse paix,
Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.

From the place she was to obliged to take in the arrangement of the scene, the apostrophe and the gestures of the actress appeared to be unconsciously directed toward Mademoiselle de Vermont, who could not restrain a startled movement.

"Look! One would think that Zibeline took that allusion for herself," said Madame Desvanneaux, whom nothing escaped.

On reëntering the greenroom, after two well-de-

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served recalls, Eugénie Gontier was soon surrounded by a throng of admirers who had come to congratulate her upon her success.

"Were *you* pleased, Henri?" she said in a low tone to the General.

"Enthusiastically!" he replied.

"Ah, then I can die happy!" she said, laughingly.

As she traversed the ranks of her admirers to go to change her costume for the last act, she found herself face to face with Zibeline, who, having quickly recovered from her emotion, was advancing on the arm of the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.

"My dear child," said the old nobleman to the actress, "I bring to you Mademoiselle de Vermont, who wishes to say to you herself——"

"That Mademoiselle must be very tired of listening to our praises," interrupted Zibeline. "But if the tribute of a foreigner can prove to her that her prestige is universal, I beg that she will accept these flowers which I dared not throw to her from my box."

"Really, Mademoiselle, you embarrass me!" Eugénie replied, somewhat surprised.

"Oh, you need not fear to take them—they are not poisoned!" added Zibeline, smiling.

And, after a gracious inclination of her head, to which the actress responded with a deep courtesy, Zibeline took again the arm of her escort in order to seek her carriage, without waiting for the end of the play.

Three-quarters of an hour later, as the audience

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was leaving the theatre, M. Desvanneaux recounted to whoever chose to listen that Mademoiselle de Vermont had passed the whole of the last *entr'acte* in the greenroom corridor, in a friendly chat with Eugénie Gontier.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INDUSTRIAL ORPHAN ASYLUM



HEN the prefectoral axe of the Baron Haussmann hewed its way through the Faubourg St. Germain in order to create the boulevard to which this aristocratic centre has given its name, the appropriation of private property for public purposes caused to disappear numerous ancient dwellings bearing armorial devices, torn down in the interest of the public good, to the equalizing level of a line of tramways. In the midst of this sacrilegious upheaval, the Hôtel de Montgeron, one of the largest in the Rue St. Dominique, had the good fortune to be hardly touched by the surveyor's line; in exchange for a few yards sliced obliquely from the garden, it received a generous addition of air and light on that side of the mansion which formerly had been shut in.

The Duke lived there in considerable state. His electors, faithful in all things, had made of their deputy a senator who sat in the Luxembourg, in virtue of the Republican Constitution, as he would have sat as a peer of France had the legitimate monarchy followed its course. He was a great lord in the true meaning of the word: gracious to the humble, affable

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among his equals, inclined, among the throng of new families, to take the part of the disinherited against that of the usurpers.

In Mademoiselle de Prerolles he had found a companion animated with the same sentiments, and the charitable organization, meeting again at the Duchess's residence, on the day following the revival of *Adrienne Lecouvreuer*, to appoint officers for the Industrial Orphan Asylum, could not have chosen a president more worthy or more devoted.

Besides such austere patronesses as Madame Desvanneaux and her daughter, the organization included several persons belonging to the world of fashion, such as Madame de Lisieux and Madame de Nointel, whose influence was the more effective because their circle of acquaintance was more extensive. The gay world often fraternizes willingly with those who are interested in philanthropic works.

The founders of the Industrial Orphan Asylum intended that the institution should harbor, bring up, and instruct as great a number as possible of the children of infirm or deceased laborers.

The secretary, M. André Desvanneaux, churchwarden of Ste.-Clotilde, as was his father before him, and in addition a Roman count, had just finished his address, concluding by making the following double statement: First, the necessity for combining all available funds for the purchase of the land required, and for the building of the asylum itself; second, to determine whether the institution could be maintained by the annual resources of the organization.

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"I should like to observe," said the Duchesse de Montgeron, "that the first of these two questions is the only order of the day. Not counting the purchase of the land, the architect's plan calls for an estimate of five hundred thousand francs in round numbers."

"And we have on hand——" said the Comtesse de Lisieux.

"One hundred and sixty-odd thousand francs from the first subscriptions," said M. Desvanneaux. "It has been decided that the work shall not begin until we have disposed of half of the sum total. Therefore, the difference we have to make up at present is about one hundred and forty thousand francs. In order to realize this sum, the committee of action proposes to organize at the Palais de l'Industrie a grand kermess, with the assistance of the principal artists from the theatres of Paris, including that of Mademoiselle Gontier, of the Comédie Française," added the secretary, with a sly smile on observing the expression of General de Prérrolles.

"Good!" Henri promptly rejoined. "That will permit Monsieur Desvanneaux to combine very agreeably the discharge of his official duties with the making of pleasant acquaintances!"

"The object of my action in this matter is above all suspicion," remarked the churchwarden, with great dignity, while his wife darted toward him a furious glance.

"You? Come, come!" continued the General, who took a mischievous delight in making trouble for the

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worthy Desvanneaux. "Every one knows quite well that you have by no means renounced Satan, his pomps—"

"And his good works!" added Madame de Nointel, with a burst of laughter somewhat out of place in this formal gathering for the discussion of charitable works.

"We are getting outside of the question," said the Duchess, striking her bell. "Moreover, is not the assistance of these ladies necessary?"

"Indispensable," the secretary replied. "Their assistance will greatly increase the receipts."

"What sum shall we decide upon as the price of admission?" asked Madame de Lisieux.

"Twenty francs," said Desvanneaux. "We have a thousand tickets printed already, and, if the ladies present wish to solicit subscriptions, each has before her the wherewithal to inscribe appropriate notes of appeal."

"To be drawn upon at sight," said the Comtesse de Lisieux, taking a pen. "A tax on vanity, I should call it."

She wrote rapidly, and then read aloud:

"**MY DEAR BARON:**

"Your proverbial generosity justifies my new appeal. You will accept, I am sure, the ten tickets which I enclose, when you know that your confrères, the Messieurs Axenstein, have taken double that number."

"And here," said the Vicomtesse de Nointel, "is a tax on gallantry." And she read aloud:

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"MY DEAR PRINCE:

"You have done me the honor to write to me that you love me. I suppose I ought to show your note to my husband, who is an expert swordsman; but I prefer to return to you your autograph letter for the price of these fifteen tickets. Go—and sin again, should your heart prompt you!"

"But that is a species of blackmail, Madame!" cried Madame Desvanneaux.

"The end justifies the means," replied the Vicomtesse gayly. "Besides, I am accountable only to the Duc de Montgeron. What is his opinion?"

"I call it a very clever stroke," said the Duke.

"You hear, Madame! Only, of course, not every lady has a collection of similar little notes!" said the Vicomtesse de Nointel.

The entrance of M. Durand, treasurer of the society, interrupted the progress of this correspondence.

"Do not trouble yourselves so much, Mesdames," said the notary. "The practical solution of the matter I am about to lay before you, if Madame the president will permit me to speak."

"I should think so!" said the Duchess. "Speak, by all means!"

"A charitable person has offered to assume all the expenses of the affair," said the notary, "on condition that *carte blanche* is granted to her in the matter of the site. In case her offer is accepted, she will make over to the society, within three months, the title to the real estate, in regular order."

"Do you guarantee the solvency of this person?"

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demanded M. Desvanneaux, who saw the project of the kermess falling to the ground.

"It is one of my rich clients; but I have orders not to reveal her name unless her offer is accepted."

The unanimity with which all hands were raised did not even give time to put the question.

"Her name?" demanded the Duchess.

"Here it is," replied the notary, handing her a visiting card.

"'Valentine de Vermont,'" she read aloud.

"Zibeline?" cried Madame de Nointel. "Bravo! I offer her the assurance of my esteem!"

"And I also," added Madame de Lisieux.

"I can not offer mine," said Madame Desvanneaux, dryly. "A young woman who is received nowhere!"

"So generous an act should open all doors to her, beginning with mine," said the Duchesse de Montgeron. "I beg that you will tell her so from me, Monsieur Durand."

"At once, Madame. She is waiting below in her carriage."

"Why did you not say so before? I must beg her myself to join us here," said the master of the house, leaving the room in haste.

"See how any one can purchase admission to our world in these days!" whispered Madame Desvanneaux in her daughter's ear.

"Heavens! yes, dear mother! The only question is whether one is able to pay the price."

We must render justice to the two titled patronesses by saying that the immediate admission of Mademois-

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selle de Vermont to their circle seemed to them the least they could do, and that they greeted her appearance, as she entered on the arm of the Duke, with a sympathetic murmur which put the final stroke to the exasperation of the two malicious dames.

"You are very welcome here, Mademoiselle," said the Duchess, advancing to greet her guest. "I am delighted to express to you, in behalf of all these ladies, the profound gratitude with which your generous aid inspires them!"

"It is more than I deserve, Madame la Duchesse!" said Valentine. "The important work in which they have taken the initiative is so interesting that each of us should contribute to it according to his means. I am alone in Paris, without relatives or friends, and these ladies have furnished me the means to cure my idleness; so it is I, rather, who am indebted to them."

Whether this speech were studied or not, it was pronounced to be in very good taste, and the stranger's conquest of the assemblage was more and more assured.

"Since you wish to join us," resumed the Duchess, "allow me to present to you these gentlemen: Monsieur Desvanneaux, our zealous general secretary——"

"I have already had the pleasure of seeing Monsieur at my house," said Valentine, "also Madame Desvanneaux; and although I was unable to accede to their wishes, I retain, nevertheless, the pleasantest recollections of their visit."

"Good hit!" whispered Madame de Nointel to her neighbor.

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"The Marquis de Prérrolles, my brother," the Duchess continued.

"The smiles of Fortune must be sweet, Mademoiselle," said the General, bowing low.

"Not so sweet as those of Glory, General," Zibeline replied, with a pretty air of deference.

"She possesses a decidedly ready wit," said Madame de Lisieux in a confidential aside.

"Now, ladies," added the president, "I believe that the best thing we can do is to leave everything in the hands of Mademoiselle and our treasurer. The examination of the annual resources will be the object of the next meeting. For to-day, the meeting is adjourned."

Then, as Mademoiselle de Vermont was about to mingle with the other ladies, the Duchess detained her an instant, inquiring:

"Have you any engagement for this evening, Mademoiselle?"

"None, Madame."

"Will you do us the honor to join us in my box at the opera?"

"But—I have no one to accompany me," said Zibeline. "I dismissed my cousin De Sainte-Foy, thinking that I should have no further need of his escort to-day."

"That does not matter at all," the Duchess replied. "We will stop for you on our way."

"I should not like to trouble you so much, Madame. If you will allow me, I will stop at your door at whatever hour will be agreeable to you, and my carriage shall follow yours."

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"Very well. At nine o'clock, if you please. They sing *Le Prophète* to-night, and we shall arrive just in time for the ballet."

"The 'Skaters' Ballet,'" said the General

This remark recalled to Mademoiselle her triumph of the evening before. "Do you bear a grudge against me?" she said, with a smile.

"Less and less of one," the General replied.

"Then, let us make a compact of peace," said Zibeline, holding out her hand in the English fashion.

With these words she left the room on the arm of the Duke, who claimed the honor of escorting her to her carriage.

"Shall you go to the opera also?" asked the Duchess of her brother.

"Yes, but later. I shall dine in town."

"Then—*au revoir*—this evening!"

"This evening!"

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN'S INSTINCT



HE General had been more favorably impressed with Zibeline's appearance than he cared to show. The generous action of this beautiful girl, her frankness, her ease of manner, her cleverness in repartee, were likely to attract the attention of a man of his character. He reproached himself already for having allowed himself to be influenced by the rancorous hostility of the Desvanneaux, and, as always happens with just natures, the sudden change of his mind was the more favorable as his first opinion had been unjust.

Such was the theme of his reflections on the route from the Hôtel de Montgeron to that of Eugénie Gontier, with whom he was engaged to dine with some of her friends, invited to celebrate her success of the evening before.

On entering her dining-room Eugénie took the arm of Lénaïff, placed Henri de Prerolles on her left and Samoreau opposite her—in his character of senior member, so that no one could mistake his transitory function with that of an accredited master of the house.

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The four other guests were distinguished writers or artists, including the painter Edmond Delorme, and, like him, all were intimate friends of the mistress of the house.

Naturally the conversation turned upon the representation of *Adrienne*, and on the applause of the fashionable audience, usually rather undemonstrative.

"Never have I received so many flowers as were given to me last night," said Eugénie, displaying an enormous beribboned basket which ornamented the table. "But that which particularly flattered me," she added, "was the spontaneous tribute from that pretty foreigner who sought me in the greenroom expressly to offer me her bouquet."

"The young lady in the proscenium box, I will wager," said Lénaïeff.

"Precisely. I know that they call her Zibeline, but I did not catch her real name."

"It is Mademoiselle de Vermont," said Edmond Delorme. "She is, in my opinion, the most dashing of all the Amazons in the Bois de Boulogne. The Chevalier de Sainte-Foy brought her to visit my studio last autumn, and I am making a life-size portrait of her on her famous horse, Seaman, the winner of the great steeplechase at Liverpool, in 1882."

"What were you pencilling on the back of your menu while you were talking?" asked the actress, curiously.

"The profile of General de Prérrolles," the painter replied. "I think that his mare Aïda would make a

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capital companion picture for Seaman, and that he himself would be an appropriate figure to adorn a canvas hung on the line opposite her at the next Salon!"

"Pardon me, dear master!" interrupted the General. "Spare me, I pray, the honor of figuring in this equestrian contra-dance. I have not the means to bequeath to posterity that your fair model possesses——"

"Is she, then, as rich as they say?" inquired one of the guests.

"I can answer for that," said the Baron de Samoreau. "She has a letter of credit upon me from my correspondent in New York. Last night, during an *entr'acte*, she gave me an order to hold a million francs at her disposal before the end of the week."

"I know the reason why," added Henri.

"But," Lénaïff exclaimed, "you told me that you did not know her!"

"I have made her acquaintance since then."

"Ah! Where?" Eugénie inquired, with interest.

"At my sister's house, during the meeting of a charitable society."

"Had it anything to do with the society for which Monsieur Desvanneaux asked me to appear in a kermess?"

"Well, yes. In fact, he has gone so far as to announce that he is assured of your coöperation."

"I could not refuse him," said Eugénie. "Under the mantle of charity, the holy man paid court to me!"

"I knew well enough that he had not yet laid down his arms forever," said the General.

ZIBELINE

"Oh, he is not the only one. His son-in-law also honored me with an attack."

"What, Monsieur de Thomery? Well, that is a good joke!"

"But what is funnier yet," continued the actress, "is the fact that the first-named gentleman was on his knees, just about to make me a declaration, apparently, when the second was announced! Immediately the father-in-law jumped to his feet, entreating me not to allow them to meet. I was compelled to open for him the door leading to the servants' stairway——"

"And what did you do with the other man?" asked Lénaïeff, laughing loudly.

"I rid myself of him in the same way. At a sign from me, my maid announced the name of the father-in-law, and the alarmed son-in-law escaped by the same road! Oh, but I know them! They will come back!"

"Under some other pretext, however," said the General. "Because Mademoiselle de Vermont's million francs have destroyed their amorous designs."

"So now we see Zibeline fairly launched," remarked the banker. "Since the Duchesse de Montgeron has taken her up, all the naughty tales that have been fabricated about her will go to pieces like a house of cards."

"That is very probable," the General concluded, "for she has made a complete conquest of my sister."

At these words a slight cloud passed over the actress's face. The imagination of a jealous mistress sees rivals everywhere; especially that of an actress.

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After dinner, while her other guests went into the smoking-room, Eugénie made a sign to her lover to remain with her, and seated herself beside him.

"I wish to ask you a question, Henri," said she.

"What is it?"

"Do you still love me?"

"What reason have you to doubt it?"

"None that warrants me in reproaching you for anything. But so many things separate us! Your career, to which you owe everything! Your social standing, so different from mine! Oh, I know that you are sincere, and that if you ever have a scruple regarding our *liaison*, you will not be able to hide it from me. It is this possibility of which I think."

"You are quite wrong, I assure you. Did I hide myself last night in order to prove openly my admiration for you? Did I appear to disclaim the allusions which you emphasized in seeming to address me in the course of your *rôle*?"

"No, that is true. Shall I make a confession? When I am on the stage, I fear nothing, because there the points of comparison are all in my favor, since you can say to yourself: 'This woman on whom all eyes are fixed, whose voice penetrates to the depths of the soul—this woman, beautiful, applauded, courted, belongs to me—wholly to me,' and your masculine vanity is pleasantly flattered. But later, Henri! When the rouge is effaced from my lips, when the powder is removed from my cheeks—perhaps revealing some premature line caused by study and late hours—if, after that, you return to your own circle, and there en-

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counter some fresh young girl, graceful and blooming, the object, in her turn, of the fickle admiration of the multitude, forgetful already of her who just now charmed them—tell me, Henri! do you not, as do the others, covet that beautiful exotic flower, and must not the poor comedienne weep for her lost prestige?"

"It is Mademoiselle de Vermont, then, who inspires you with this apprehension," said the General, smiling.

"Well, yes, it is she!"

"What childishness! Lénaleff will tell you that I have never even looked at her."

"Last night, perhaps—but to-day?"

"We exchanged no more than a dozen words."

"But the more I think of her visit to the green-room, the more inexplicable it appears to me."

"You need not be surprised at that: she does nothing that any one else does."

"These things are not done to displease you."

"I may agree as to that; but what conclusion do you draw?"

"That she is trying to turn your head."

"My head! You jest! I might be her father."

"That is not always a reason——"

Nevertheless, Henri's exclamation had been so frank that Eugénie felt somewhat reassured.

"Are you going so soon?" she said, seeing him take his hat.

"I promised my sister to join her at the opera. Besides, this is your reception night, and I leave you to your duties as hostess. To-morrow, at the usual

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hour—and we will talk of something else, shall we not?"

"Ah, dearest, that is all I ask!" said Eugénie.

He attempted to kiss her hand, but she held up her lips. He pressed his own upon them in a long kiss, and left her.

CHAPTER XV

DEFIANCE OF MRS. GRUNDY



OR more than fifty years the first proscenium box on the ground floor, to the left, at the Opéra, had belonged exclusively to ten members of the Jockey Club, in the name of the oldest member of which the box is taken. When a place becomes vacant through any cause, the nine remaining subscribers vote on the admission of a new candidate for the vacant chair; it is a sort of academy within the national Academy of Music.

When this plan was originated, that particular corner was called "the infernal box," but the name has fallen into desuetude since the dedication of the fine monument of M. Garnier. Nevertheless, as it is counted a high privilege to be numbered among these select subscribers, changes are rare among them; besides, the members are not, as a rule, men in their first youth. They have seen, within those walls, the blooming and the renewal of several generations of pretty women; and the number of singers and dancers to whom they have paid court in the *coulisses* is still greater.

From their post of observation nothing that occurs

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either before or behind the curtain escapes their analysis—an analysis undoubtedly benevolent on the part of men who have seen much of life, and who accord willingly, to their younger fellow-members, a little of that indulgence of which they stand in need themselves.

An event so unexpected as the enthronement of Zibeline in one of the two large boxes between the columns, in company with the Duchesse de Montgeron, Madame de Lisieux, and Madame de Nointel, did not escape their observation and comment.

"The Duchess is never thoughtless in her choice of associates," said one of the ten. "There must be some very powerful motive to induce her to shield with her patronage a foreigner who sets so completely at defiance anything that people may say about her."

"Nonsense! What is it, after all, that they say about this young woman?" demanded the senior member of the party. "That she rides alone on horseback. If she were to ride with a groom, some one would be sure to say that he was her lover. They say that she drives out without any female chaperon beside her in the carriage. Well, if she had one, they would probably find some other malicious thing to say. Paris has become like a little country town in its gossip."

"And all this," added a third member, "because she is as lovely as a dream, and because she drives the handsomest turnout in the Bois. If she were ugly, and contented herself with a hired carriage, she would be absolved without confession!"

ZIBELINE

"Where the deuce does Christian charity come in, in all this gossip?" said Henri de Prerolles to himself, who had just entered the box and overheard the last remarks. "Will you grant me your hospitality until the beginning of the next act, gentlemen?" he said aloud. "My sister's box is full of guests and transient visitors; she can not admit even me!"

The General was a great favorite with the members of the club. One of them rose to offer him his place.

"Thank you, no," said the General. "I shall stay only a moment, to escape a cloud of questioners in the *oyer*. Every one that stops me asks——"

"About the new recruit in the Duchess's box, eh?" said a member. "We, too, wish to inquire about her; we are all leagued together. But if it is a secret——"

"There is no secret about it," the General replied; and in a few words he explained the enigma.

"Why, then," exclaimed the senior member, "she is indeed the fowl that lays the golden eggs! What a lucky bird will be the one that mates with her!"

The rising curtain sent the spectators back to their places. The augurs of the Duchess's box reinstalled themselves before it where they could examine at their ease through their lorgnettes the fair stranger of whom so much had been said; and, mounting to the next floor, the General was at last able to find room among his sister's guests.

"You can see for yourself that our young friend is altogether charming," whispered Madame de Nointel, behind the shelter of her fan, and indicating Zibeline.

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"If you pronounce her so, Madame, she can receive no higher praise," said Henri.

"Say at once that you think me exasperating," laughed the lady.

"Was it not you that first called her Zibeline?" Henri inquired.

"Yes, but she calls herself Valentine—which rhymes, after all. Not richly enough for her, I know, but her means allow her to do without the supporting consonant. See how beautiful she is to-night!"

In fact, twenty-four hours had sufficed to change the lonely stranger of the day before into the heroine of this evening, and the satisfaction that shone in her face tempered the somewhat haughty and disdainful expression that had hitherto characterized her.

"You have not yet said 'good-evening' to Mademoiselle de Vermont, Henri," said the Duchess to her brother, and he changed his place in order to act upon her hint.

"Ah, is it you, General?" said Zibeline, affecting not to have seen him until that moment. "It seems that music interests you less than comedy."

"What has made you form that opinion, Mademoiselle?"

"The fact that you arrive much later at the opera than at the Comédie Française."

"Have you, then, kept watch upon my movements?"

"Only a passing observation of signs—quite allowable in warfare!"

"But I thought we had made a compact of peace."

ZIBELINE

"True enough, we did make it, but suppose it were only an armistice?"

"You are ready, then, to resume hostilities?" said Henri.

"Now that I have Madame la Duchesse, your sister, for an ally, I fear no enemies."

"Not even if I should call for aid upon the camp of Desvanneaux?"

"Alceste leagued with Tartufe? That idea never occurred to Molière," said Zibeline, mischievously.

"Take care!" said the Duchess, interrupting this skirmishing, "you will fall over into the orchestra! It is growing late, and if Mademoiselle de Vermont does not wish to remain to see the final conflagration, we might go now, before the crowd begins to leave."

"I await your orders, Madame la Duchesse," said Zibeline, rising.

The other ladies followed her example, receiving their cloaks from the hands of their cavaliers, and the occupants of the box made their exit in the following order: Zibeline, on the arm of the Duke; the Comtesse de Lisieux, leaning upon M. de Nointel; Madame de Nointel with the General; the Duchess bringing up the procession with M. de Lisieux.

As soon as they reached the outer lobby their footmen ran to find their carriages, and that of the Duc de Montgeron advanced first.

"I beg, Madame, that you will not trouble yourself to wait here until my carriage comes," said Mademoiselle de Vermont to the Duchess, who hesitated to leave her guest alone.

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"Since you wish it, I will leave you, then," said the Duchess, "and we thank you for giving us your society this evening. My brother will accompany you to your carriage."

When Zibeline's vehicle drove up to the entrance in its turn, the General conducted his charge to the door of a marvellously equipped brougham, to which was harnessed a carriage-horse of powerful frame, well suited to the kind of vehicle he drew.

A thaw had begun, not yet transforming the gutters into yellow torrents rushing toward the openings of the sewer, but covering the streets with thick, black mud, over which the wheels rolled noiselessly.

"Your carriage is late, is it not?" said Zibeline, after the General had handed her into the brougham.

"My carriage?" said the General. "Behold it!"

He pointed to a passing *fiacre*, at the same time hailing the driver.

"Don't call him. I will take you home myself," said Zibeline, as if such a suggestion were the most natural thing in the world.

"You know that in France it is not the custom," said the General.

"What! Do you bother yourself with such things at your age?"

"If my age seems to you a sufficient guaranty, that is different. I accept your invitation."

"To the Hôtel de Montgeron," said Zibeline to her footman.

"I never shall forget your sister's kindness to me," she continued, as the carriage rolled away. "She ful-

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fils my idea of the great lady better than any other woman I have seen."

"You may be proud of her friendship," said Henri. "When once she likes a person, it is forever. I am like her in that respect. Only I am rather slow in forming friendships."

"And so am I."

"That is obvious, else you would have been married ere this."

"No doubt—to some one like young Desvanneaux, perhaps. You are very flattering! If you think that I would sacrifice my independence for a man like that——"

"But surely you do not intend to remain unmarried."

"Perhaps I shall—if I do not meet my ideal."

"All women say that, but they usually change their minds in the end."

"Mine is one and indivisible. If I do not give all I give nothing."

"And shall you wait patiently until your ideal presents himself?"

"On the contrary, I am always looking for him."

"Did you come to Europe for that purpose?"

"For that and for nothing else."

"And suppose, should you find your ideal, that he himself raises obstacles?"

"I shall try to smooth them away."

"Do you believe, then, that the power of money is irresistible?"

"Far from it! A great fortune is only a trust which Providence has placed in our hands, in order that we

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may repair, in its name, the injustices of fate. But I have another string to my bow."

"What is it?"

"The force of my will."

"You have plenty of that! But suppose, by some impossible chance, your ideal resists you even then?"

"Then I know what will remain for me to do."

"You will resort to the pistol?"

"Not for him, but for myself," she replied, in a tone so resolute as to exclude any suggestion of bravado.

Zibeline's horse, which was a rapid trotter, now stopped before the Hôtel de Montgeron, arriving just in advance of the Duchess's carriage, for which the Swiss was watching at the threshold of the open *porte-cochère*. He drew himself up; the brougham entered the gate at a swift pace, described a circle, and halted under the marquée at the main entrance. The General sprang lightly to the ground.

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," bowing, hat in hand, to his charming conductor.

"Call me Valentine, please," she responded, with her usual ease of manner.

"Even in the character of a stage father, that would be rather too familiar," said the Marquis.

"Not so much so as to call me Zibeline," said Mademoiselle de Vermont, laughing.

"Ha! ha! You know your sobriquet, then?"

"I have known it a long time! Good-night, General! We shall meet again."

Then, addressing her footman, she said in English: "Home!"

CHAPTER XVI

FRATERNAL ADVICE



LIKE all residences where the owners receive much company, the Hôtel de Montgeron had a double *porte-cochère*. Just as the Swiss opened the outer gate to allow the departure of Mademoiselle de Vermont, the two carriages crossed each other on the threshold. In fact, Henri had had hardly time to cross the courtyard to mount to his own apartments before his brother-in-law and his sister stopped him at the foot of the steps. He rejoined them to say good-night.

"Won't you come and take a cup of tea with us in the little salon?" they asked.

"Willingly," was his response. He followed them, and all three seated themselves beside a table which was already laid, and upon which the boiling water sang in the kettle.

"Leave us," said the Duchess to the butler. "I will serve tea myself. Did Mademoiselle de Vermont bring you home?" she asked, when the servant had retired.

"Well," said Henri, "in proposing to do so she mentioned my discreet age, which appeared to her to

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make the thing all right! If I had declined her invitation, I should have seemed to pose as a compromising person! That is the reason why I accepted."

"You did quite right. What do you really think of her?"

"She is very different from what I had fancied her: I find her frank, intellectual, full of originality. I have only one fault to mention: she is too rich."

"Well, surely, you do not expect her to ruin herself to please you."

"I should think not! Besides, what would be the object?"

"To permit you to fall in love with her."

"Oh, that is what you are thinking of, is it?"

"Certainly, for, if need be, perhaps you would make a sacrifice to your feelings."

"In what way?"

"In the toleration of a few remaining millions which she might retain, so that when you marry her neither of you will be reduced to absolute beggary!"

"Marry her!—I?" cried the General, astonished.

"What is there to prevent your doing so?"

"The past, my dear sister. To speculate upon my title and my rank in order to make a wealthy marriage? To quit my nomad's tent for a fixed residence other than that where the Prerolles have succeeded one another from generation to generation? Never! Of all our ancient prejudices, that is the only one I cherish. Besides, I am free at present to serve my country under any form of government which it may please her to adopt. But, with his hereditary estates

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lost, through his own fault, shall he who has nothing left to him but his name form a mere branch of another family? He has no right to do so."

This declaration was categorical. Madame de Montgeron bent her head; her jesting vein was quenched in a moment.

After a moment of silence the Duke spoke.

"There are scruples that one does not discuss," he said. "But, on the other hand, if I do not deceive myself, there are others which can be adjusted to suit circumstances."

"What circumstances?" said the General.

"The subject is rather delicate—especially to mention before you, my dear Jeanne."

"I was just about to propose that I should retire," said the Duchess. "Good-night, Henri!" And she bent to kiss him.

"You are not vexed?" said her brother, embracing her tenderly.

"What an idea! Good-night!"

"Am I always to be considered as occupying the stool of repentance?" Henri inquired, as soon as his sister had left the room.

"Yes, but you will not be offended if I interrogate you a little, after the manner of a judge?" said the Duke.

"Quite the contrary. Go on; I will listen."

"Had you not just now expressed yourself very distinctly in disfavor of any project of marriage because of perfectly unimpeachable principles, I should not permit myself to make any allusion to your private

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life. Every man is his own master in his choice of *liaisons*, and on that head is answerable only to his own conscience. In these days, moreover, art is on a level with birth, and talent with military glory. You see that I am quite modern in my ideas! However——”

“Ah, there is a reserve?”

“Without liability. Mademoiselle Gontier is surrounded by great luxury. She maintains an expensive house and keeps an open table. Her annual salary and her income can not possibly cover these expenses. Whence does she obtain further resources?”

“From the investments made for her by the Baron de Samoreau.”

“Without her having to pay a commission of any kind? A most remarkable case of disinterestedness!”

“I never have sought to examine the matter particularly,” said Henri.

“And is that the way you keep yourself informed? A future general-in-chief!”

“I was not aware that I am in an enemy’s country.”

“No, but you are in a conquered country, which is still more dangerous. Oh, no one will attack you face to face at the point of the sword. But behind your back, in the shadow, you have already massed against you various rejected swains, the Desvanneaux of the *coulisses*, jealous of a preference which wounds their own vanity, and the more ready to throw discredit—were they able—upon a man of your valor, because they are better armed against him with the logic of facts.”

“What logic, in heaven’s name?”

ZIBELINE

"That which emanates from the following dilemma: Either Danaë is obliged to hide from Jupiter—or, rather, from Mæcenas—her intimacy with you—and you are only a lover who simply loves her—or else Mæcenas is an epicurean who has no objection to share his fortune philosophically; so that ostensibly you sit at the feast without paying the cost—which is worse yet."

"Does any one dare to say that of me?" cried the General, springing from his chair.

"They are beginning to say it," the Duke replied, his eyes fixed on his brother-in-law, who paced to and fro, gnawing his moustache. "I ask your pardon for throwing such a bucket of ice-water on you, but with men of your constitution——"

"Pleurisy is not mortal," Henri interrupted briefly. "I know. Don't worry about me."

"I knew you would understand," said the Duke, going toward the door of his own apartments. "That is the reason why I have not spared you a thorough ducking!"

"I thank you," said the General, as he was about to leave the room. "I will talk to you about this tomorrow. The night brings counsel."

Wrapped in thought, he made his way to the little suite of apartments between the ground floor and the first story which he occupied, and which had a separate door opening on the Rue de Bellechase.

At the foot of the stairs, in a coach-house which had been transformed into a chamber, slept the orderlies beneath the apartment of their chief. This apart-

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ment, composed of four rooms, was of the utmost simplicity, harmonizing with the poverty of its occupant, who made it a point of honor not to attempt to disguise his situation.

The ante-chamber formed a military bureau for the General and his chief orderly.

The salon, hung with draperies to simulate a tent, had no other decoration than some trophies of Arabian arms, souvenirs of raids upon rebellious tribes.

More primitive still was the bedroom, furnished with a simple canteen bed, as if it were put up in a temporary camp, soon to be abandoned.

The only room which suggested nothing of the anchorite was the dressing-room, furnished with all the comforts and conveniences necessary to an elegant and fastidious man of the world.

But his real luxury, which, by habit and by reason of his rank, the General had always maintained, was found among his horses, as he devoted to them all the available funds that could be spared from his salary. Hence the four box-stalls placed at his disposal in the stables of his brother-in-law were occupied by four animals of remarkably pure blood, whose pedigrees were inscribed in the French stud-book. Neither years, nor the hard service which their master had seen, had deteriorated any of his ability as a dashing horseman. His sober and active life having even enabled him to preserve a comparatively slender figure, he would have joined victoriously in the races, except that his height made his weight too heavy for that amusement.

ZIBELINE

Entering his own domain, still overwhelmed with the shock of the revelations and the gossip of which he never had dreamed, he felt himself wounded to the quick in all those sentiments upon which his *amour-propre* had been most sensitive.

The more he pondered proudly over his pecuniary misfortunes, the more grave the situation appeared to him, and the more imperious the necessity of a rupture.

When it had been a question of dismissing Fanny Dorville, an actress of humble standing, his parting gift, a diamond worth twenty-five thousand francs, had seemed to him a sufficient indemnity to cancel all accounts.

But now, in the presence of an *artiste* of merit, who had given herself without calculation and who loved him for himself alone, how, without wounding her heart and her dignity, could he break violently a chain so light yesterday, so heavy to-day?

To indulge in tergiversation, to invent some subterfuge to cover his retreat—he did not feel himself capable of such a course; moreover, his manœuvre would be quickly suspected by a clever woman whom nothing escaped.

To ask to be sent back to Africa, just at the time when his intelligent and practical instruction in the latest grand manœuvres had drawn all eyes upon him, would compromise, by an untimely retirement, the advantages of this new office, the object of his ambition.

For the first time this nobleman, always prompt and

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radical in his decisions, found himself hesitating; and, such is the power of human egotism even in generous natures, he felt almost incensed against Eugénie, the involuntary cause of his hesitation.

After weighing everything carefully in his mind, he finally said to himself that an open confession, sincere and unrestricted, would be the best solution of the difficulty; and just as the first light of day came to dissipate the shadow that overcast his mind, when his orderly entered to open the blinds in his chamber, he formed a fixed resolution as to his course.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LADY BOUNTIFUL



ALENTINE DE VERMONT was not yet twenty-two years old.

Her birth had cost the life of her mother, and, brought up by an active and enterprising man, her education had been directed by plain common-sense, rather masculine, perhaps, but without injury to her personal attractions, nor to those of her delicate and lofty spirit.

Her father, who was endowed with a veritable genius for commercial action, had monopolized more than the fur-trade of Alaska and of Hudson's Bay. From year to year he had extended the field of his operations: in Central America, dealing in grains and salt meats; in Europe in wines and brandy; commodities always bought at the right time, in enormous quantities, and, without pausing in transshipment from one country to another, carried in vessels belonging to him and sailing under the English flag.

Without giving her any unnecessary instruction as to the management of his affairs, he wished his daughter to possess sufficient knowledge of them to handle herself the wealth that she would receive as a dowry

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and at his death; and he decided that she should not contract a marriage except under the law of the separation of goods, according to the custom generally adopted in the United States.

An attack of paralysis having condemned him to his armchair, he consecrated the remainder of his days to settling all his enterprises, and when he died, about two years before the arrival of Valentine in Paris, that young lady found herself in the possession of more than one hundred and twenty million francs, nearly all invested in English, American, and French State bonds.

At the expiration of her period of mourning, the wealthy heiress could then live in London, New York, or Paris, at her pleasure; but the French blood that ran in her veins prevented her from hesitating a moment, and she chose the last named of the three cities for her abode.

Being passionately fond of saddle- and driving-horses, she did not stop in England without taking the necessary time to acquire everything of the best for the fitting-up of a stable, and after a time she established herself temporarily in a sumptuous apartment in the Place de l'Etoile, furnished with a taste worthy of the most thorough Parisian.

On the evening after her appearance at the Opera, just as she left her breakfast-table, M. Durand presented himself at her dwelling with the architect's plan for the building of the orphan asylum, and declared himself ready to take her orders regarding the plan, as well as on the subject of the gift of money to the Society.

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"I have resolved," said Zibeline, "to transform into an asylum, following a certain plan, the model farm belonging to the estate that I have recently purchased through you. If I required *carte blanche* in choosing the site, it was because I desire that Monsieur Desvanneaux shall have nothing to do with the matter until the day when I shall put the committee in possession of the building and its premises, which I have engaed to furnish, free of all expense to the Society. I shall employ my own architect to execute the work, and I shall ask you to indemnify, for me, the architect who has drawn up this first plan, which will remain as the minimum expense incurred on my part. But I wish to be the only person to superintend the arrangements, and to be free to introduce, without control, such improvements as I may judge suitable. Should the committee demand a guaranty, I have on deposit with Monsieur de Samoreau a million francs which I intend to use in carrying out these operations. Half of that sum may be consigned to the hands of some one they may wish to choose; the other half will serve to pay the laborers in proportion to their work. In order to insure even greater regularity, have the kindness to draw up, to cover the interval that will elapse before I make my final definite donation, a visionary document, setting forth the engagement that I have undertaken to carry out."

"Here it is," said the notary; "I have already prepared it."

Having examined the document carefully, to assure herself that all statements contained therein were ac-

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cording to her intentions, Zibeline took her pen and wrote at the foot of the page: "Read and approved," and signed the paper.

"Mademoiselle appears to be well accustomed to business habits," observed M. Durand, with a smile.

"That is because I have been trained to them since childhood," she replied. "My plan is to place this document myself in the hands of Madame la Duchesse de Montgeron."

"You can do so this very afternoon, if you wish. Thursday is her reception day," said the notary, rising with a bow, preparatory to taking his leave.

"I shall take good care not to fail to call," earnestly replied the fair Lady Bountiful.

She telephoned immediately to her head-groom, ordering him to bring around her brougham at three o'clock.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MODERN TARTUFE



T the same hour that the elegant carriage of Zibeline was conducting her to the Hôtel de Montgeron, M. Desvanneaux descended from a modest *fiacre* at the gate of the hôtel occupied by Eugénie Gontier.

The first impulse of the actress—who was engaged in studying a new rôle in her library—was not to receive her importunate visitor; but a sudden idea changed her determination, and she gave the order to admit him.

“This is the first time that I have had the high favor of being admitted to this sanctuary,” said the church-warden, kissing with ardor the hand that the actress extended to him.

“Don’t let us have so great a display of pious manifestations,” she said, withdrawing her hand from this act of humility, which was rather too prolonged. “Sit down and be sensible,” she added.

“Can one be sensible when he finds himself at your feet, dear Mademoiselle? At the feet of the idol who is so appropriately enthroned among so many artistic objects!” replied the honey-tongued Prudhomme, adjusting his eyeglasses. “The bust of General de Pré-

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rolles, no doubt?" he added, inquiringly, scrutinizing a marble statuette placed on the high mantelpiece.

"You are wrong, Monsieur Desvanneaux; it is that of Molière!"

"I beg your pardon!—I am standing so far below it! I, too, have on my bureau a bust of our great Poquelin, but Madame Desvanneaux thinks that this author's style is somewhat too pornographic, and has ordered me to replace his profane image by the more edifying one of our charitable patron, Saint Vincent de Paul."

"Is it to tell me of your family jars that you honor me with this visit?" said Eugénie.

"No, indeed! It was rather to escape from them, dear Mademoiselle! But alas! my visit has also another object: to release you from the promise you were so kind as to make me regarding the matter of our kermess; a project now unfortunately rendered futile by that Zibeline!"

"Otherwise called 'Mademoiselle de Vermont.'"

"I prefer to call her Zibeline—that name is better suited to a courtesan."

"You are very severe toward her!"

"I can not endure hypocrites!" naïvely replied the worthy man.

"She appeared to me to be very beautiful, however," continued Eugénie Gontier, in order to keep up the conversation on the woman who she felt instinctively was her rival.

"Beautiful! Not so beautiful as you," rejoined M. Desvanneaux, gallantly. "She is a very ambitious

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person, who throws her money at our heads, the better to humiliate us."

"But, since it is all in the interest of the Orphan Asylum—"

"Say, rather, in her own interest, to put herself on a pedestal because of her generosity! Oh, she has succeeded at the first stroke! Already, at the Hôtel de Montgeron they swear by her; and if this sort of thing goes on, I shall very soon be regarded only as a pariah!"

"Poor Monsieur Desvanneaux!"

"You pity me, dear Mademoiselle? I thank you! The *rôle* of consoler is truly worthy of your large heart, and if you do not forbid me to hope—" said this modern Tartufe, approaching Eugénie little by little.

"Take care!" said she; "suppose the General should be hidden under that table, like Orgon!"

"The General!" exclaimed Desvanneaux; "he is too much occupied elsewhere!"

"Occupied with whom?"

"With Zibeline, probably. He never left her side all the evening, last night at the Opera."

"Pardon me! He was here until after ten o'clock."

"Yes, but afterward—when the opera was over?"

"Well, what happened when the opera was over?" Eugénie inquired, forcing herself to hide her emotion.

"They went away together! I saw them—I was watching them from behind a column. What a scandal!"

"And your conclusion on all this, Monsieur Desvanneaux?"

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"It is that the General is deceiving you, dear Mademoiselle."

"With that young girl?"

"A bold hussy, I tell you! A Messalina! Ah, I pity you sincerely in my turn! And should a devoted consoler, a discreet avenger, be able to make you forget this outrage to your charms, behold me at your feet, devoting to you my prayers, awaiting only a word from you to become the most fortunate among the elect——"

A loud knock at the outer door spared Mademoiselle Gontier the trouble of repelling her ridiculous adorer, who promptly scrambled to his feet at the sound.

"A visitor!" he murmured, turning pale. "Decidedly, I have no luck——"

"Monsieur le Marquis de Prerolles is in the drawing-room," a domestic announced.

"Beg him to wait," said Eugénie, reassured by this visit, which was earlier than the usual hour. "You see that you are badly informed, Monsieur Desvanneaux," she added.

"For heaven's sake, spare me this embarrassing meeting!" said the informer, whose complexion had become livid.

"I understand. You fear a challenge?"

"Oh, no, not that! My religious principles would forbid me to fight a duel. But the General would not fail to rally me before my wife regarding my presence here, and Madame Desvanneaux would be pitiless."

"Own, however, that you richly deserve a lesson,

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Lovelace that you are! But I will take pity on you," said Eugénie, opening a door at the end of the room. "The servants' stairway is at the end of that corridor. You know the way!" she added, laughing.

"I am beginning to know it, dear Mademoiselle!" said the pitiful beguiler, slipping through the doorway on tiptoe.

CHAPTER XIX

BROKEN TIES



FTER picking up a chair which, in his alarm, the fugitive had overturned in his flight, Mademoiselle Gontier herself opened the door leading to the drawing-room.

“Come in, Henri!” said she, lifting the portière.

“Do I disturb you?” the General inquired, entering the library.

“Never! You know that well! But how gravely you asked the question!”

“For the reason that I wish to speak to you about serious matters, my dear Eugénie.”

The image of Zibeline passed before the eyes of the actress. That which Desvanneaux had revealed, in accusing the girl of debauchery, now appeared plausible to her, if considered in another way.

“You are about to marry!” she exclaimed.

They were the same words pronounced by Fanny Dorville in similar circumstances.

“Never! You know that well enough!” he replied, in his turn.

“Speak, then!” said she, sinking upon a chair and motioning him to a seat before her.

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He obeyed, and sitting so far forward upon his chair that his knees touched her skirt, he took both her hands in his own, and said gently:

“You know how much I love you, and how much I esteem you. You know, too, the story of my life: my past follies, and also the honorable career I have run in order to atone for them morally, for in a material sense they are irreparable—according to my ideas, at least. This career has been fortunate. I have reached the highest rank that a soldier can attain to-day. But my rapid promotion, however justifiable it may be, has none the less awakened jealousy. The nature of my services being above all possibility of suspicion, calumny has sought another quarter at which to strike, and at this moment it is my delicacy which is impugned.”

“Your delicacy, Henri! What do you mean?” asked Eugénie, in an altered voice.

“Our friendship is well known. You are rich, and I have only my pay: the antithesis is flagrant! The gossips comment upon it, and exploit the fact against me.”

“Against you!” cried Eugénie, indignantly.

“Against me—yes. I have proof of it. A man in private life would be justified in ignoring such gossip, but for a man in my profession ambiguity has no place, nor has compromise. Himself a severe judge of the conduct of others, he must not afford them a single instance whereby they can accuse him of not following his own precepts.”

And, as his companion remained silent and

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startled before an explanation so unexpected, he added:

"You say nothing, my love. You must divine the depth of my chagrin at the prospect of a necessary separation, and you are sufficiently charitable not to remind me that I ought to have made these tardy reflections before I yielded to a fascination which made me close my eyes to facts."

"I reproach you with nothing, Henri," said Eugénie in a trembling voice. "I myself yielded to the same enchantment, and in abandoning myself to it, I did not foresee that some day it might be prejudicial to your honor. A singular moral law is that of the world!" she pursued, growing more excited. "Let General de Prérrolles be the lover of Madame de Lisieux or of Madame de Nointel; let him sit every day at their tables—if there be only a husband whose hand he may clasp in greeting, no one will call this hospitable *liaison* a crime! But let him feel anything more than a passing fancy for Eugénie Gontier, who violates no conjugal vow in loving him, but whose love he is not rich enough to buy—even were that love for sale—oh, then, everyone must point at him the finger of scorn! As for myself, it seems that it was useless for me to resist so many would-be lovers in order to open my door more freely to the man of my choice—an action which no one holds against me, however, because I am only an actress, and the public classes us in a separate category, so that they may more readily offer up to us the incense with which they smother us! Be it so! There are also in my profession disinterested hearts

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which may serve as examples—and I pretend to the very highest rank as an actress in every *rôle* I assume, even in this city. Take back your liberty, Henri!"

"I have most unwillingly offended you," said he, sadly.

"You? Ah, no! I know that you are loyal and sincere, and I could not harbor resentment against you after your avowal. You would have lacked self-confidence had you acted otherwise. But," she continued, "have you indeed told me all?"

"All!" he replied, without hesitation.

"Will you give me your word of honor that no other woman stands between you and me?"

"I swear it to you!"

"I thank you! You are incapable of lying. Whatever happens, you never will have a better friend than I, for your just pride is still more dear to me than my own. If you cease to come to the theatre, and appear no more at my receptions, that will be sufficient to insure the silence of gossip concerning us. Go without remorse, Henri! But come back to see me sometimes—quietly, without the knowledge of the envious—will you not?"

"Do you doubt it?" he responded, folding her tenderly in his arms.

"Yes and no! But if this is our supreme farewell, do not tell me so!"

CHAPTER XX

ZIBELINE RECEIVES



HE Duchesse de Montgeron had no children, and her most tender affections were concentrated upon her husband and her brother. The scruples which caused the latter to forswear matrimony grieved her deeply, for, knowing the inflexibility of his character, she was sure that no one in the world could make him alter his decision.

Thus, on one side the title of the Duc de Montgeron was destined to pass to a collateral branch of the family; and on the other, the title of Marquis de Prérôles would become extinct with the General.

But, although she now considered it impossible to realize the project which she had momentarily cherished, she continued to show the same kindness to Mademoiselle de Vermont. She would have regarded any other course as unworthy of her, since she had made the first advances; moreover, the young girl's nature was so engaging that no one who approached her could resist her charm.

Very reserved or absolutely frank, according to the degree of confidence with which she was treated, Valentine had sufficient intuition to avoid a lack of tact.

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She was, in feminine guise, like *L'Ingénue* of Voltaire, struck, as was Huron, with all that was illogical in our social code; but she did not make, after his fashion, a too literal application of its rules, and knew where to draw the line, if she found herself on the point of making some hazardous remark, declaring frankly: "I was about to say something foolish!" which lent originality to her playful conversation.

After receiving from Valentine's hands the contract signed in presence of the notary, for the benefit of the Orphan Asylum, the president of the society did not fail to give a dinner in honor of the new patroness.

As she was a foreigner she was placed in the seat of honor at the table, to the great displeasure of Madame Desvanneaux, who was invited to take the second place, in spite of her title of vice-president.

"It is because of her millions that she was placed before me," she said in an undertone to her husband, as soon as the guests had returned to the drawing-room. And, giving orders that her carriage should be summoned immediately, she left the house without speaking to any one, and with the air of a peeress of England outraged in her rights of precedence!

This was, for the hostile pair, a new cause of grievance against Zibeline. When she, in her turn, gave at her home a similar dinner, a fortnight later, she received from them, in reply to her invitation, which was couched in the most courteous terms, a simple visiting-card, with the following refusal: "The Comte and the Comtesse Desvanneaux, not being in the habit of

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accepting invitations during Lent, feel constrained to decline that of Mademoiselle de Vermont."

The dinner was only the more gay and cordial.

Valentine's household was conducted on a footing more elegant than sumptuous:

The livery was simple, but the appearance of her people was irreproachable. The butler and the house servants wore the ordinary dress-coat and trousers; the powdered footmen wore short brown coats, ornamented, after the English fashion, with metal buttons and a false waistcoat; the breeches were of black velveteen, held above the knee by a band of gold braid, with embroidered ends, which fell over black silk stockings. At the end of the ante-chamber where this numerous *personnel* was grouped, opened a long gallery, ornamented with old tapestries representing mythological subjects in lively and well-preserved coloring. This room, which was intended to serve as a ballroom at need, was next to two large drawing-rooms. The walls of one were covered with a rich material, on which hung costly paintings; the furniture and the ceiling of the other were of oak, finely carved, relieved with touches of gold in light and artistic design.

Everywhere was revealed an evident desire to avoid an effect of heaviness and ostentation, and this was especially noticeable in the dining-room, where the pure tone of the panels and the moulding doubled the intensity of the light thrown upon them. Upon the table the illumination of the apartment was aided by two large candelabra of beautifully chiselled silver,

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filled with candles, the light of which filtered through a forest of diaphanous little white shades.

The square table was a veritable parterre of flowers, and was laid for twelve guests, three on each side.

The young mistress of the house was seated on one side, between the Duc de Montgeron and the Marquis de Prerolles. Facing her sat the Duchesse de Montgeron, between General Lénaieff and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy. Laterally, on one hand appeared Madame de Lisieux, between M. de Nointel and the painter Edmond Delorme; on the other, Madame de Nointel, between M. de Lisieux and the Baron de Samoreau.

Never, during the six weeks that Valentine had had friendly relations with the Duchess, had she appeared so self-possessed, or among surroundings so well fitted to display her attractions of mind and of person. She was a little on the defensive on finding herself in this new and unexpected society, but she felt, this evening, that she was in the midst of a sympathetic and admiring circle, and did the honors of her own house with perfect ease, finding agreeable words and showing a delicate forethought for each guest, and above all displaying toward her protectress a charming deference, by which the Duchess felt herself particularly touched.

"What a pity!" she said to herself, glancing alternately at Zibeline and at her brother, between whom a tone of frank comradeship had been established, free from any coquetry on her side or from gallantry on his.

The more clearly Henri divined the thoughts of his sister, the more he affected to remain insensible to the

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natural seductions of his neighbor, to whom Lénaïeff, on the contrary, addressed continually, in his soft and caressing voice, compliments upon compliments and madrigals upon madrigals!

"Take care, my dear Constantin!" said Henri to him, bluntly. "You will make Mademoiselle de Vermont quite impossible. If you go on thus, she will take herself seriously as a divinity!"

"Fortunately," rejoined Zibeline, "you are there, General, to remind me that I am only a mortal, as Philippe's freedman reminded his master every morning."

"You can not complain! I serve you as a confederate, to allow you to display your erudition," retorted the General, continuing his persiflage.

But he, too, was only a man, wavering and changeable, to use Montaigne's expression, for his eyes, contradicting the brusqueness of his speech, rested long, and not without envy, on this beautiful and tempting fruit which his fate forbade him to gather. The more he admired her freshness, and the more he inhaled her sweetness, the more the image of Eugénie Gontier was gradually effaced from his memory, like one of those tableaux on the stage, which gauze curtains, descending from the flies, seem to absorb without removing, gradually obliterating the pictures as they fall, one after another.

CHAPTER XXI

A DASHING AMAZON



N leaving the table, the fair "Amphytryonne" proposed that the gentlemen should use her private office as a smoking-room, and the ladies followed them thither, pretending that the odor of tobacco would not annoy them in the least, but in reality to inspect this new room.

Edmond Delorme had finished his work that very morning, and the enormous canvas, with its life-size subject, had already been hung, lighted from above and below by electric bulbs, the battery for which was cleverly hidden behind a piece of furniture.

The portrait, bearing a striking resemblance to the original, was indeed that of "the most dashing of all the Amazons on the Bois," to quote the words of the artist, who was a better painter of portraits than of animals, but who, in this case, could not separate the rider from her steed.

Seaman, a Hungarian bay, by Xenophon and Lena Rivers, was drawn in profile, very erect on his slender, nervous legs. He appeared, on the side nearest the observer, to be pawing the ground impatiently with his hoof, a movement which seemed to be facilitated by

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his rider, who, drawn in a three-quarters view and extending her hand, allowed the reins to fall over the shoulders of her pure-blooded mount.

“What do you think of it?” Zibeline inquired of General de Prérrolles.

“I think you have the air of the commander of a division of cavalry, awaiting the moment to sound the charge.”

“I shall guard her well,” said Zibeline, “for she would be sure to be put to rout by your bayonets.”

“Not by mine!” gallantly exclaimed Lénaïeff. “I should immediately lower my arms before her!”

“You!—perhaps! But between General de Prérrolles and myself the declaration of war is without quarter. Is it not, General?” said Valentine, laughing.

“It is the only *declaration* that fate permits me to make to you, Mademoiselle,” Henri replied, rather dryly, laying emphasis on the double sense of his words.

This rejoinder, which nothing in the playful attack had justified, irritated the Duchess, but Valentine appeared to pay no attention to it, and at ten o’clock, when a gypsy band began to play in the long gallery, she arose.

“Although we are a very small party,” she said, “would you not like to indulge in a waltz, Mesdames? The gentlemen can not complain of being crowded here,” she added, with a smile.

M. de Lisieux and M. de Nointel, as well as Edmond Delorme, hastened to throw away their cigar-

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ettes, and all made their way to the long gallery. The Baron de Samoreau and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy remained alone together.

The Duchess took the occasion to speak quietly to her brother.

"I assure you that you are too hard with her," she said. "There is no need to excuse yourself for not marrying. No one dreams of such a thing—she no more than any one else. But she seems to have a sentiment of friendship toward you, and I am sure that your harshness wounds her."

A more experienced woman than Madame de Montgeron, who had known only a peaceful and legitimate love, would have quickly divined that beneath her brother's brusque manner lurked a budding but hopeless passion, whence sprang his intermittent revolt against the object that had inspired it.

This revolt was not only against Zibeline's fortune; it included her all-pervading charm, which penetrated his soul. He was vexed at his sister for having brought them together; he was angry with himself that he had allowed his mind to be turned so quickly from his former prejudices; and, however indifferent he forced himself to appear, he was irritated against Lénaïeff because of the attentions which that gentleman showered upon Zibeline, upon whom he revenged himself by assuming the aggressive attitude for which the Duchess had reproached him.

In a still worse humor after the sisterly remonstrance to which he had just been compelled to listen, he seated himself near the entrance of the gallery, where the

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gypsy band was playing one of their alluring waltzes, of a cadence so different from the regular and monotonous measure of French dance music.

The three couples who were to compose this impromptu ball, yielded quickly to the spell of this irresistible accompaniment.

"Suppose Monsieur Desvanneaux should hear that we danced on the eve of Palm Sunday?" laughingly pro-tested Madame de Lisieux.

"He would report it at Rome," said Madame de Nointel.

And, without further regard to the compromising of their souls, each of the two young women took for a partner the husband of the other.

Mademoiselle de Vermont had granted the eager request of Lénaïeff that she would waltz with him, an occupation in which the Russian officer acquitted himself with the same respectful correctness that had formerly obtained for him the high favor of some grand duchess at the balls in the palace of Gatchina.

He was older and stouter than his brother-in-arms, Henri de Prerolles, and a wound he had received at Plevna slightly impeded his movements, so that he was unable to display the same activity in the dance as the other waltzers, and contented himself with moving à *trois temps*, in an evolution less in harmony with the brilliancy of the music.

Henri, on the contrary, who had been a familiar friend of the Austrian ambassador at the time when the Princess de Metternich maintained a sort of open ballroom for her intimates, had learned, in a good

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school, all the boldness and elegance of the Viennese style of dancing.

But he sat immovable, as did also Edmond Delorme, because of the lack of partners; and, not wishing to take the second place after Lénaïff, his rival, he would not for the world abandon his *rôle* of spectator, unless some one forced him to it.

“Suppose we have a cotillon figure, in order to change partners?” said Valentine suddenly, during a pause, after she had thanked her partner.

And, to set the example, she took, from a basket of flowers, a rosebud, which she offered to Henri.

“Will you take a turn with me?” she said, with the air of the mistress of the house, who shows equal courtesy to all her guests.

“*A deux temps?*” he asked, fastening the rosebud in his buttonhole.

“Yes, I prefer that,” she replied.

He passed his arm around her waist, and they swept out upon the polished floor, he erect and gallant, she light and supple as a gazelle, her chin almost resting upon her left hand, which lay upon her partner’s shoulder, her other hand clasped in his.

At times her long train swirled in a misty spiral around her, when they whirled about in some corner; then it spread out behind her like a great fan when they swept in a wide curve from one end of the gallery to the other.

During the feverish flight which drew these two together, their breasts touched, the bosom of the enchantress leaned against the broad chest of the vigor-

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ous soldier, her soft hair caressed his cheek, he inhaled a subtle perfume, and a sudden intoxication overflowed his heart, which he had tried to make as stern and immobile as his face.

"How well you waltz!" murmured Zibeline, in his ear.

"I am taking my revenge for my defeat on the ice," he replied, clasping her a little closer, in order to facilitate their movements.

"The prisoners you take must find it very difficult to escape from your hands," she said, with a touch of malice.

"Does that mean that already you wish to reclaim your liberty?"

"Not yet—unless you are fatigued."

"Fatigued! I should like to go thus to the end of the world!"

"And I, too," said Zibeline, simply.

By common consent the other waltzers had stopped, as much for the purpose of observing these two as for giving them more space, while the wearied musicians scraped away as if it were a contest who should move the faster, themselves or the audacious couple.

"What a pity!" again said the Duchess to her husband, whose sole response was a shrug of his shoulders as he glanced at his brother-in-law.

At the end of his strength, and with a streaming brow, the gypsy leader lowered his bow, and the music ceased.

Henri de Prerolles, resuming his *sang-jroid*, drew the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont through his

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arm, and escorted her to her place among the other ladies.

“Bravo, General!” said Madame de Lisieux. “You have won your decoration, I see,” she added, indicating the rosebud which adorned his buttonhole.

“What shall we call this new order, ladies?” asked Madame de Nointel of the circle.

“The order of the Zibeline,” Valentine replied, with a frank burst of laughter.

“What?—do you know——” stammered the author of the nickname, blushing up to her ears.

“Do not disturb yourself, Madame! The zibeline is a little animal which is becoming more and more rare. They never have been found at all in my country, which I regret,” said Mademoiselle de Vermont graciously.

The hour was late, and the Duchess arose to depart. The Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, exercising his function as a sort of chamberlain, went to summon the domestics. Meanwhile Valentine spoke confidentially to Henri.

“General,” said she, “I wish to ask a favor of you.”

“I am at your orders, Mademoiselle.”

“I am delighted with the success of this little dinner,” Valentine continued, “and I wish to give another after Easter. My great desire is to have Mademoiselle Gontier—with whom I should like to become better acquainted—recite poetry to us after dinner. Would you have the kindness to tell her of my desire?”

“I!” exclaimed the General, amazed at such a request.

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"Yes, certainly. If you ask her, she will come all the more willingly."

"You forget that I am not in the diplomatic service, Mademoiselle."

"My request annoys you? Well, we will say no more about it," said Zibeline. "I will charge Monsieur de Samoreau with the negotiations."

They rejoined the Duchess, Zibeline accompanying her to the vestibule, always evincing toward her the same pretty air of deference.

The drive home was silent. The Duke and the Duchess had agreed not to pronounce the name of Mademoiselle de Vermont before Henri, who racked his brain without being able to guess what strange motive prompted the young girl to wish to enter into closer relations with the actress.

A letter from Eugénie was awaiting him. He read:

"Two weeks have elapsed since you have been to see me. I do not ask whether you love me still, but I do ask you, in case you love another, to tell me so frankly.

"ADRIADNE."

"So I am summoned to the confessional, and am expected to accuse myself of that which I dare not avow even to my own heart! Never!" said Henri, crushing the note in his hand. "Besides, unless I deceive myself, Ariadne has not been slow in seeking a consoling divinity! Samoreau is at hand, it appears. He played the part of Plutus before; now he will assume that of Bacchus," thought the recreant lover, in order to smother his feeling of remorse.

CHAPTER XXII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING



HE life of General de Prerolles was uniformly regulated. He arose at dawn, and worked until the arrival of his courier; then he mounted his horse, attired in morning military costume.

After his ride, he visited the quartermaster-general of his division, received the report of his chief of staff, and gave necessary orders. It was at this place, and never at the General's own dwelling, that the captains or subaltern officers presented themselves when they had occasion to speak to him.

At midday he returned to breakfast at the Hôtel de Montgeron where, morning and evening, his plate was laid; and soon after this meal he retired to his own quarters to work with his orderly, whose duty it was to report to him regarding the numerous guns and pieces of heavy ordnance which make the object of much going and coming in military life.

After signing the usual number of documents, the General would mount another of his horses, and at this hour would appear in civilian attire for an afternoon canter. After this second ride he would pass an hour

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at his club, but without ever touching a card, no matter what game was in progress.

He dined at different places, but oftenest with his sister, where by this time a studied silence was preserved on the subject of Zibeline. This, however, did not prevent him from thinking of her more and more.

Mademoiselle de Vermont had not been seen again in the Bois de Boulogne since the night of her dinner, although Henri had sought in vain to meet her in the mornings in the bridle-path, and afternoons in the Avenue des Acacias.

He decided that probably she did not wish to ride during Holy Week; but when several days had passed after Easter, and still she was not seen amusing herself in her usual fashion, he said to himself that perhaps it would be the proper thing to make what is called "a dinner-call."

There are some women whose fascination is so overwhelming as to cause the sanest of lovers to commit themselves, whence comes the slightly vulgar expression, "He has lost his bearings." Henri began to feel that he was in this state when he presented himself at Zibeline's home. A domestic informed him that Mademoiselle had been absent a week, but was expected home that evening. He left his card, regretting that he had not waited twenty-four hours more.

It was now the middle of April, the time when the military governor of Paris is accustomed to pass in review the troops stationed on the territory under his command, and this review was to take place the next morning.

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The order for the mobilizing of his own division having been received and transmitted, Henri's evening was his own, and he resolved to pass it with Lénaïeff, feeling certain that his colleague at least would speak to him of Zibeline.

The aide-de-camp general lived at the Hôtel Continental, much frequented by Russians of distinction. Henri found his friend just dressing for dinner, and well disposed to accept his proposition.

As they descended the stairs, they passed an imposing elderly man, with white moustache and imperial, still very erect in his long redingote with military buttons—a perfect type of the German officer who gets himself up to look like the late Emperor William I. This officer and the French general stopped on the stairs, each eyeing the other without deciding whether he ought to salute or not, as often happens with people who think they recognize some one, but without being able to recall where or in what circumstances they have met before.

It was Henri whose memory was first revived.

"Captain, you are my prisoner!" he said, gayly, seizing the stranger by the collar.

"What! The Commandant de Prerolles!" cried the elderly man, in a reproachful tone, from which fifteen years had not removed the bitterness.

"I know who he is!" said Lénaïeff. "Monsieur is your former jailer of the frontier fortress!"

The officer of the *landwehr* attempted to withdraw from the hand that held him.

"Oh, I don't intend to let *you* escape! You are

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coming to dine with us, and we will sign a treaty of peace over the dessert," said Henri, clasping the officer's hand affectionately.

His tone was so cordial that the stranger allowed himself to be persuaded. A quarter of an hour later all three were seated at a table in the *Café Anglais*.

"I present to you General Lénaieff," said Henri to his guest. "You should be more incensed against him than against me, for, if he had done his duty, you would probably have had me imprisoned again."

"Not imprisoned—shot!" the Captain replied, with conviction.

"In that case I regret my complicity still less," said Lénaieff, "for otherwise I should have lost an excellent friend, and, had Prerolles been shot, he never could have made me acquainted with the delicious Mademoiselle de Vermont!"

"Ah! So that is what you are thinking of?" Henri said to himself.

"I do not know the young lady of whom you speak," the German interrupted; "but I know that, for having allowed the Commandant to escape, I was condemned to take his place in the prison, and was shut up there for six months, in solitary confinement, without even seeing my wife!"

"Poor Captain! How is the lady?" Henry inquired.

"Very well, I thank you."

"Will you permit us to drink her health?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

"*Hoch! hoch!*" said Henri, lifting his glass.

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"*Hoch! hoch!*!" responded the ex-jailer, drinking with his former prisoner.

This delicate toast began to appease the bitterness of the good man; while the memories of his escape, offering a diversion to Henri's mind, put him in sympathetic humor with the stranger.

"Ah! There are mountains that we never climb but once," he said. "We three, meeting in Paris, can prove the truth of that proverb."

"Not only in Paris," said Lénaïeff. "If you were in Saint Petersburg, Henri, you might, any evening, see your old flame, Fanny Dorville."

"Does she keep a *table d'hôte*?"

"No, indeed, my boy. She plays duenna at the Théâtre Michel, as that fat Héloïse used to do at the Palais-Royal. She must have died long ago, that funny old girl!"

"Not at all. She is still living, and is a pensioner of the Association of Dramatic Artists! But, pardon me, our conversation can hardly be amusing to our guest."

"No one can keep a Frenchman and a Russian from talking about women! The habit is stronger than themselves!" said the old officer, with a hearty laugh.

"Well, and you, Captain," said Lénaïeff: "Have you not also trodden the primrose path in your time?"

"Gentlemen, I never have loved any other woman than my own wife," replied the honest German, laying his large hand upon his heart, as if he were taking an oath. "That astonishes you Parisians, eh?" he added benevolently.

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"Quite the contrary! It assures us peace of mind!" said Lénaïeff. "To your health, Captain!"

"And yours, Messieurs!"

And their glasses clinked a second time

"*A propos*," said Lénaïeff to Henri, "the military governor has asked me to accompany him to-morrow to the review at Vincennes. I shall then have the pleasure of seeing you at the head of your division."

"*Teufel!*" exclaimed the German officer; "it appears that the Commandant de Prérrolles has lost no time since we took leave of each other."

"Thanks to you, Monsieur! Had you not allowed me to withdraw from your society, I should certainly not have reached my present rank! To your health, Captain!"

"To yours, General!"

Succeeding bumpers finally dissipated entirely the resentment of the former jailer, and when they parted—probably never to meet again—he and his prisoner had become the best friends in the world.

"*Meine besten compliments der Frau Hauptmannin!*" said Henri to him, in leaving him on the boulevard.

"*Lieber Gott!* I shall take good care not to own to her that I dined with you."

"And why, pray?"

"Because there is one thing for which she never will forgive you."

"What is that?"

"The fact that you were the cause of her living alone for six months!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MILITARY REVIEW



THE different troops, assembled for review, were massed on the parade-ground at Vincennes, facing the tribunes.

In the centre, the artillery brigade, surrounded by two divisions of infantry, was drawn up in two straight columns, connected by regiments; each division of infantry, in double columns, was connected by brigades.

These six columns were separated by spaces varying from twenty to twenty-five metres.

In the background, the cavalry division was lined up in columns; behind that was its artillery, in the same order of formation.

At a given signal, the troops advanced five hundred metres, and, as soon as they halted, drums, clarinets and trumpets beat and sounded from all parts of the field, saluting the arrival of the military governor of Paris.

This functionary, followed by his staff, in the midst of which group glittered the brilliant Russian uniform of the aide-de-camp General Léniaeff, rode slowly past the front and the flanks of the massed body, the troops facing to the left or the right as he passed.

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This inspection finished, he took up his stand before the pillars at the entrance, and the march past began by battalions *en masse*, in the midst of the acclamations of numerous spectators who had come to witness this imposing display, well calculated to stir patriotic pride.

The enthusiasm increased; the Prélolles division marched past after its artillery, and, as always, the martial and distinguished profile of its general produced its usual effect on the public.

He rode Aïda, his favorite mare, an Irish sorrel of powerful frame, with solid limbs, whose horizontal crupper and long tail indicated her race; she was one of those animals that are calm and lively at the same time, capable of going anywhere and of passing through all sorts of trials.

After its parade, the infantry, whose part in the affair was finished, retraced their steps and took up a position on the other side of the field of manœuvres, facing the north, and in front of rising ground, in preparation for the discharge of musketry.

During this time the artillery brigade, re-formed in battle array on the parade-ground, detached six batteries, which advanced at a trot to within one hundred and fifty metres of the tribunes, where they discharged a volley. The long pieces were run rapidly to right and left, unmasking the cavalry, which, after a similar volley from its own batteries, appeared behind them in battle order, and executed a galloping march, its third line held in reserve.

A few moments later all the troops rejoined the

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infantry on the ground set apart for rest and for the purpose of partaking of a cold repast, consisting of potted meats, with which each man was furnished.

Nothing more picturesque could be imagined than this temporary camp, with its stacked arms, knapsacks lying on the ground, holes dug in the ground in which to kindle fires, and the clattering of cans. On the other side of the field the artillerymen and cavalrymen ate, holding their reins under their arms, while their officers stood around some temporary table, served by canteen men of the united divisions. Tiny columns of blue smoke rose where coffee was making, and everywhere were the swift movement and sprightly good-fellowship in which the soldier feels himself in his natural element.

The curious spectators crowded themselves in front of the banner, while in the centre of the square the military governor of Paris, and the other officers, talked with some privileged persons who had been able to present themselves among them.

Descending from his mount a little apart from the group, and plunged in thought, the former sub-lieutenant of *chasseurs à pied* gazed at the old fortress, the sight of which recalled so many sad memories.

Vincennes had been his first garrison, and its proximity to Paris had been disastrous for him. There he had entered one morning, stripped of his fortune! And what a series of disasters had followed! But for his heavy losses upon that fatal night, he would not have been compelled to sell Prérölles, the income of which, during his long absence, would have sufficed

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to lessen the tax on the land, transmissible, had events turned out otherwise, to some heir to his name. If only fate had not made Paul Landry cross his path!

“Good morning, General!” came the sound of a fresh, gay voice behind, which sent a thrill through him.

He turned and saw Zibeline, who had just stopped a few steps distant from him, sitting in her carriage, to which was harnessed a pretty pair of cobs, prancing and champing their bits.

“Ah, it is you, Mademoiselle!” he said, carrying his hand to the visor of his *képi*, fastened under his chin.

“I found your card last night,” said Zibeline, “and I have come here this morning to return your call!”

Then, leaning back in her driving-seat in order to reveal Edmond Delorme installed beside her, she added:

“I have brought also my painter-in-ordinary. We have watched the review together, and he is as enthusiastic as I over the picturesque effect of this improvised bivouac. See! He is so much occupied with his sketch that I can not get a word out of him.”

It was Aida, whose bridle was held by a dragoon, that served as a model for the artist’s pencil.

“Will you permit me?” he said to Henri.

“It appears decidedly that my mare has caught your eye,” replied the General, approaching the carriage and resting his spurred foot on its step.

“She has superb lines,” said the painter, without interrupting his drawing.

“Well, I am curious to know whether she could beat

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Seaman," said Zibeline. "Are you willing to run a race with me, General?"

"As you please—some morning when you return to the Bois."

"You noticed my absence, then?"

"I assure you that I did," Henri replied, earnestly.

Then, fearing that he had said too much, he added: "I, and many others!"

"Good! You were almost making a pretty speech to me, but, as usual, the disavowal was not slow in coming. Fortunately, here comes your friend Lénaïeff, who is hastening to make amends to me."

"What good fortune to meet you here, Mademoiselle!" cried Constantin, who, having perceived Valentine from a distance, had taken an abrupt leave of his general-in-chief.

"I know that you have called to see me several times," said she, "but I was in the country."

"So early in the month of April?"

"Oh! not to live there. Monsieur de Prérrolles knows that I have promised to build our Orphan Asylum at a certain distance from Paris, and hardly three weeks remain to me before I must hand over the property. If I am not ready on the day appointed, Monsieur Desvanneaux will be sure to seize my furniture, and I could not invite you any more to dinner, Messieurs! *A propos*, General, Monsieur de Samoreau has failed in his negotiations. Mademoiselle Gontier refuses to come to recite at my next *soirée!*"

"What necessity is there for you to make her acquaintance?" demanded Henri.

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"Ah, that is my secret!"

During this conversation a hired *fâcre*, well appointed, had stopped beside the road, and Eugénie Gontier descended from it, inquiring of an officer belonging to the grounds where she could find General de Prélolles. When the officer had pointed out the General to her, she started to walk toward him; but, on seeing her former lover leaning familiarly against the door of Zibeline's carriage, she immediately retraced her steps and quickly reentered her own.

"There is no longer any doubt about it!" said Mademoiselle de Vermont, who had been observing Eugénie's movements. "Mademoiselle Gontier has made a fixed resolution to avoid meeting me."

"That is because she is jealous of you!" said Lénaïeff naïvely.

"Jealous? And why?" said Zibeline, blushing.

Visibly embarrassed, Henri drew out his watch in order to avert his countenance.

"Midday!" he cried. "This is the hour for the return of the troops to their barracks. You would do well not to delay in starting for home, Mademoiselle. The roads will be very crowded, and your horses will not be able to trot. I beg your pardon for taking away your model, my dear Delorme, but I really must be off."

"It is all the same to me; I have finished my sketch," said the painter, closing his portfolio.

At this moment, as the military governor passed near them, on his way to the crossway of the Pyramid, Henri made a movement as if to rejoin him.

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"Do not disturb yourself, General de Prerolles," said the military governor. "The compliments which I have made you on the fine appearance of your troops are probably not so agreeable to you as those to which you are listening at present!"

And saluting Mademoiselle de Vermont courteously, he went his way.

"Now you are free, Henri. Suppose we accompany Mademoiselle back to Paris?" suggested Lénaïeff, seeming to read his friend's mind.

"What an honor for me!" Valentine exclaimed.

The General made a sign to his orderly, who approached to receive his instructions.

"Tell the brigadier-generals that I am about to depart. I need no more escort than two cavalrymen for General Lénaïeff and myself. Now I am ready, Mademoiselle," Henri continued, turning toward Valentine. "If you will be guided by me, we should do well to reach the fortifications by way of the Lake of Saint-Mandé."

She made a little sound with her tongue, and the two cobs set off in the direction indicated, the crowds they passed stopping to admire their high action, and asking one another who was that pretty woman who was escorted by two generals, the one French, the other a foreigner.

"I must look like a treaty of peace in a Franco-Russian alliance!" said Zibeline, gayly.

The sun shone brightly, the new leaves were quivering on the trees, the breeze bore to the ear the echo of the military bands.

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Animated by the sound, the two cobs went ahead at a great pace, but they were kept well in hand by their mistress, who was dressed this morning in a simple navy-blue costume, with a small, oval, felt hat, ornamented with two white wings, set on in a manner that made the wearer resemble a valkyrie. Her whip, an unnecessary accessory, lay across the seat at her right, on which side of the carriage Henri rode.

The General's eyes missed none of the graceful movements of the young girl. And his reflections regarding her, recently interrupted, returned in full force, augmenting still more his regret at the inexorable fate that separated him from her. "What a pity!" he thought in his turn, repeating unconsciously the phrase so often uttered by his sister.

Arrived at the Place du Trône, Valentine stopped her horses a moment, and addressed her two cavaliers:

"I thank you for your escort, gentlemen. But however high may be your rank, I really can not go through Paris looking like a prisoner between two gendarmes! So good-by! I shall see you this evening perhaps, but good-by for the present."

They gave her a military salute, and the carriage disappeared in the Faubourg St.-Antoine, while the two horsemen followed the line of the quays along the Boulevard Diderot.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CHALLENGE



HAT person who, in springtime, between ten o'clock and midday, never has walked beside the bridle-path in the Bois de Boulogne, under the deep shade of the trees, can form no idea of the large number of equestrans that for many years have been devoted to riding along that delightful and picturesque road.

To see and to be seen constitutes the principal *raison d'être* of this exercise, where the riders traverse the same path going and coming, a man thus being able to meet more than once the fair one whom he seeks, or a lady to encounter several times a cavalier who interests her.

On this more and more frequented road, the masculine element displayed different costumes, according to the age and tastes of each rider. The young men appeared in careless array: leggins, short coats, and small caps. The older men, faithful to early traditions, wore long trousers, buttoned-up redingotes, and tall hats, like those worn by their fathers, as shown in the pictures by Alfred de Dreux.

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For the feminine element the dress is uniform. It consists of a riding-habit of black or dark blue, with bodice and skirt smoothly molded to the form by one of the two celebrated habit-makers, Youss or Creed. The personal presence alone varied, according to the degree of perfection of the model.

A cylindrical hat, a little straight or turned-over collar, a cravat tied in a sailor's knot, a gardenia in the buttonhole, long trousers and varnished boots completed the dress of these modern Amazons, who, having nothing in common with the female warriors of ancient times, are not deprived, as were those unfortunates, of any of their feminine charms.

The military element is represented by officers of all grades from generals to sub-lieutenants, in morning coats, with breeches and high boots, forbidden under the Second Empire, but the rule at present.

At the top of the Pré-Catelan, the path is crossed by the Bagatelle road to the lakes, a point of intersection situated near a glade where the ladies were fond of stopping their carriages to chat with those passing on horseback. A spectator might have fancied himself at the meet of a hunting-party, lacking the whippers-in and the dogs.

A few days after the review at Vincennes, on a bright morning in May, a file of victorias and pony-chaises were strung out along this sylvan glade, and many persons had alighted from them. Announcing their arrival by trumpet-blasts, two or three vehicles of the Coaching Club, headed by that of the Duc de Montgeron, had discharged a number of pretty passengers,

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whose presence soon caused the halt of many gay cavaliers.

Several groups were formed, commenting on the news of the day, the scandal of the day before, the *jeu* announced for the next day.

More serious than the others, the group surrounding Madame de Montgeron strolled along under the trees in the side paths which, in their windings, often came alongside of the bridle-path.

"What has become of Mademoiselle de Vermont, Duchess?" inquired Madame de Lisieux, who had been surprised not to find Zibeline riding with their party.

"She is in the country, surrounded by masons, occupied in the building of our Orphan Asylum. The time she required before making over the property to us expires in two weeks."

"It is certainly very singular that we do not know where we are to go for the ceremonies of inauguration," said Madame Desvanneaux, in her usual vinegar tones.

"I feel at liberty to tell you that the place is not far away, and the journey thence will not fatigue you," said the president, with the air of one who has long known what she has not wished to reveal heretofore.

"The question of fatigue should not discourage us when it is a matter of doing good," said M. Desvanneaux. "Only, in the opinion of the founders of the Orphan Asylum, it should be situated in the city of Paris itself."

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"The donor thought that open fields and fresh air would be better for the children."

"Land outside of Paris costs very much less, of course; that is probably the real reason," said M. Desvanneaux.

"Poor Zibeline! you are well hated!" Madame de Nointel could not help saying.

"We neither like nor dislike her, Madame. We regard her as indifferently as we do that," the churchwarden replied, striking down a branch with the end of his stick, with the superb air of a Tarquin.

Still gesticulating, he continued:

"The dust that she throws in the eyes of others does not blind us, that is all!"

The metaphor was not exactly happy, for at that instant the unlucky man received full in his face a broadside of gravel thrown by the hoofs of a horse which had been frightened by the flourishing stick, and which had responded to the menace by a violent kick.

This steed was none other than Seaman, ridden by Mademoiselle de Vermont. She had recognized the Duchess and turned her horse back in order to offer her excuses for his misconduct, the effects of which Madame Desvanneaux tried to efface by brushing off the gravel with the corner of her handkerchief.

"What has happened?" asked General de Prérolles, who at that moment cantered up, mounted on Aïda.

"Oh, nothing except that Mademoiselle has just missed killing my husband with that wicked animal of hers!" cried the Mægera, in a fury.

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"Mademoiselle might turn the accusation against him," Madame de Nointel said, with some malice. "It was he who frightened her horse."

The fiery animal, with distended veins and quivering nostrils, snorted violently, cavorted sidewise, and tried to run. Zibeline needed all her firmness of grasp to force him, without allowing herself to be thrown, to stand still on the spot whence had come the movement that had alarmed him.

"Your horse needs exercise," said Henri to the equestrienne. "You ought to give him an opportunity to do something besides the formal trot around this path."

"I should be able to do so, if ever we could have our match," said Zibeline. "Will you try it now?"

"Come on!"

She nodded, gave him her hand an instant, and they set off, side by side, followed by Zibeline's groom, no less well mounted than she, and wearing turned-over boots, bordered with a band of fawn-colored leather, according to the fashion.

CHAPTER XXV

THE AMAZON HAS A FALL



HEY were a well-matched pair: he, the perfect type of the elegant and always youthful soldier; she, the most dashing of all the Amazons in the Bois, to quote the words of Edmond Delorme.

Everyone was familiar with the personal appearance of both riders, and recognized them, but until now Mademoiselle de Vermont had always ridden alone, and now to see her accompanied by the gallant General, whose embroidered *képi* glittered in the sunlight, was a new spectacle for the gallery.

The people looked at them all the more because Seaman was still prancing, but without unseating his mistress, who held him at any gait or any degree of swiftness that pleased her.

"What a good seat you have!" said Henri.

"That is the first real compliment you ever have paid me. I shall appropriate it immediately, before you have time to retract it," Zibeline replied.

At the circle of Mélèzes, Henri proposed to turn to the right, in order to reach Longchamp.

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"A flat race! You are joking!" Zibeline cried, turning to the left, toward the road of La Vierge.

"You don't intend that we shall run a steeplechase, I hope."

"On the contrary, that is exactly my intention! You are not afraid to try it, are you?"

"Not on my own account, but on yours."

"You know very well that I never am daunted by any obstacle."

"Figuratively, yes; but in riding a horse it is another matter."

"All the more reason why I should not be daunted now," Zibeline insisted.

When they arrived at the public square of the Cascades, in front of the Auteuil hippodrome, she paused a moment between the two lakes, uncertain which course to take.

It was Thursday, the day of the races. The vast ground, enclosed on all sides by a fence, had been cleared, since early morning, of the boards covering the paths reserved for pedestrians on days when there was no racing; but it was only eleven o'clock, and the place was not yet open to the paying public. Several workmen, in white blouses, went along the track, placing litters beside the obstacles where falls occurred most frequently.

"Do you think the gatekeeper will allow us to enter at this hour?" Zibeline asked.

"I hope not!" Henri replied.

"Well, then, I shall enter without his permission! You are free to declare me the winner. I shall be left

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to make a walkover, I see!" And setting off at a gallop along the bridle-path, which was obstructed a little farther on by the fence itself, she struck her horse resolutely, and with one audacious bound sprang over the entrance gate. She was now on the steeplechase track.

"You are mad!" cried the General, who, as much concerned for her safety as for his own pride, urged on his mare, and, clearing the fence, landed beside Zibeline on the other side.

"All right!" she cried, in English, dropping her whip, as the starter drops the flag at the beginning of a race.

The die was cast. Henri bent over Aïda's neck, leaning his hands upon her withers in an attitude with which experience had made him familiar, and followed the Amazon, determined to win at all hazards.

Zibeline's groom, an Englishman, formerly a professional jockey, had already jumped the fence, in spite of the cries of the guard, who ran to prevent him, and coolly galloped after his mistress, keeping at his usual distance.

The first two hedges, which were insignificant obstacles for such horses, were crossed without effort.

"Not the brook, I beg of you!" cried Henri, seeing that, instead of running past the grand-stand, Zibeline apparently intended to attempt this dangerous feat.

"Come on! Seaman would never forgive me if I balk at it!" she cried, riding fearlessly down the slope,

The good horse gathered up his four feet on the brink, took one vigorous leap, appearing for a second

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to hover over the water; then he fell lightly on the other side of the stream, with a seesaw movement, to which the intrepid Amazon accommodated herself by leaning far back. The rebound threw her forward a little, but she straightened herself quickly and went on.

The General, who had slackened his pace that he might not interfere with her leap, gave vent to a sigh of relief. He pressed Aïda's flanks firmly, and the big Irish mare jumped after her competitor, with the majestic dignity of her race.

Reassured by the *savoir-faire* of his companion, the former winner of the military steeplechase felt revive within himself all his ardor for the conflict, and he hastened to make up the distance he had lost.

The two horses, now on the west side of the race-track, were almost neck-and-neck, and it would have been difficult to prognosticate which had the better chance of victory. Zibeline's light weight gave Seaman the advantage, but Aïda gained a little ground every time she leaped an obstacle; so that, after passing the hurdles and the third hedge, the champions arrived simultaneously at the summit of the hill, from which point the track extends in a straight line, parallel with the Allée des Fortifications.

Feeling himself urged on still harder, the English horse began to lay back his ears and pull so violently on the rein that his rider had all she could do to hold him, and lacked sufficient strength to direct his course. Seeing Zibeline's danger, Henri hastened to slacken his horse's pace, but it was too late: the almost per-

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pendicular declivity of the other side of the hill added fresh impetus to the ungovernable rush of Seaman, who suddenly became wild and reckless.

The situation was all the more critical for the reason that the next obstacle was a brook, only two metres wide, but of which the passage was obstructed on the farther side of the track by heavy beams, laid one on top of another, solidly riveted and measuring one metre and ten millimetres from the base to the summit. The excited horse charged obliquely toward this obstruction with all his might. Paying no more attention to the pressure upon his bit, he rose in the air, but as he had not given himself sufficient time to take plenty of room for the leap, his hoofs struck violently against the top beam, the force of resistance of which threw him over on one side; his hindquarters turned in the air, and he fell in a heap on the other side of the obstacle, sending up a great splash of water as he went into the brook.

Had Zibeline been crushed by the weight of the horse in this terrible fall, or, not having been able to free herself from him, had she been drowned under him? Henri uttered a hoarse cry, struck his spurs into the sides of his mare, crossed the brook breathlessly, stopping on the other side as soon as he could control his horse's pace; then, rushing back, he leaped to the ground to save the poor girl, if there was still time to do so.

Zibeline lay inanimate on the grass, her face lying against the earth. By a lucky chance, the horse had fallen on his right side, so that his rider's limbs and

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skirt had not been caught. Unhorsed by the violence of the shock, Zibeline had gone over the animal's head and fallen on the other side of the brook. Her Amazon hat, so glossy when she had set out, was now crushed, and her gloves were torn and soiled with mud; which indicated that she had fallen on her head and her hands.

Henri knelt beside her, passed his arm around her inert and charming body, and drew her tenderly toward him. Her eyes were half-open and dull, her lips pale; her nose, the nostrils of which were usually well dilated, had a pinched look; and a deadly pallor covered that face which only a moment before had been so rosy and smiling.

These signs were the forerunners of death, which the officer had recognized so many times on the battlefield. But those stricken ones had at least been men, devoting themselves to the risks of warfare; while in the presence of this young girl lying before him, looking upon this victim of a reckless audacity to which he felt he had lent himself too readily, the whole responsibility for the accident seemed to him to rest upon his own shoulders, and a poignant remorse tore his heart.

He removed her cravat, unhooked her bodice, laid his ear against her breast, from which an oppressed breathing still arose.

Two laborers hurried to open the gate and soon arrived at the spot with a litter, guided by the groom, whose horse had refused to jump the brook, and who since then had followed the race on foot outside the

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track. While the General placed Zibeline on the litter, the groom took Aïda by the bridle, and the sad procession made its way slowly toward the enclosure surrounding the weighing-stand.

As for Seaman, half submerged in the stream, and with an incurable fracture of the leg, nothing was left to do for the poor animal but to kill him.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UNCONSCIOUS AVOWAL



ALKING slowly, step by step, beside her whose power had so quickly and so wholly subjugated him, watching over her removal with more than paternal solicitude, Henri de Prérolles, sustained by a ray of hope, drew a memorandum-book from his pocket, wrote upon a slip of paper a name and an address, and, giving it to the groom, ordered him to go ahead of the litter and telephone to the most celebrated surgeon in Paris, requesting him to go as quickly as possible to the domicile of Mademoiselle de Vermont, and, meantime, to send with the greatest despatch one of the eight-spring carriages from the stables.

It was noon by the dial on the grand-stand when the litter was finally deposited in a safe place. The surgeon could hardly arrive in less than two hours; therefore, the General realized that he must rely upon his own experience in rendering the first necessary aid.

He lifted Valentine's hand, unbuttoned the glove, laid his finger on her pulse, and counted the pulsations, which were weak, slow, and irregular.

While the wife of the gate-keeper kept a bottle of

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salts at the nostrils of the injured girl, Henri soaked a handkerchief in tincture of arnica and sponged her temples with it; then, pouring some drops of the liquid into a glass of water, he tried in vain to make her swallow a mouthful. Her teeth, clenched by the contraction of muscles, refused to allow it to pass into her throat.

At the end of half an hour, the inhalation of the salts began to produce a little effect; the breath came more regularly, but that was the only symptom which announced that the swoon might soon terminate.

The landau with the high springs arrived. The General ordered the top laid back, and helped to lift and place upon the cushions on the back seat the thin mattress on which Zibeline lay; then he took his place on the front seat, made the men draw the carriage-top back into its proper position, and the equipage rolled smoothly, and without a jar, to its destination.

On the way they met the first carriages that had arrived at the Auteuil hippodrome, the occupants of which little suspected what an exciting dramatic incident had occurred just before the races.

Zibeline's servants, by whom she was adored, awaited their mistress at the threshold, and for her maids it was an affair of some minutes to undress her and lay her in her own bed. During this delay, the surgeon, who had hastened to answer the call, found Henri nervously walking about from one drawing-room to the other; and, having received information as to the details of the fall, he soon entered the bedchamber.

While awaiting the sentence of life or of death

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which must soon be pronounced, he who considered himself the chief cause of this tragic event continued to pace to and fro in the gallery—that gallery where, under the intoxication of a waltz, the demon of temptation had so quickly demolished all his resolutions of resistance.

A half-hour—an age!—elapsed before the skilled practitioner reappeared. “There is no fracture,” he said, “but the cerebral shock has been such that I can not as yet answer for the consequences. If the powerful reactive medicine which I have just given should bring her back to her senses soon, her mental faculties will suffer no harm. If not, there is everything to fear. I will return in three hours,” he added.

Without giving a thought to the conventionalities, Henri entered the bedchamber, to the great astonishment of the maids, and, installing himself at the head of the bed, he decided not to leave that spot until Valentine had regained her senses, should she ever regain them.

An hour passed thus, while Henri kept the same attitude, erect, attentive, motionless, with stray scraps of his childhood’s prayers running through his brain.

Suddenly the heavy eyelids of the wounded girl were lifted; the dulness of the eyes disappeared; her body made an involuntary attempt to change its position; the nostrils dilated; the lips quivered in an effort to speak.

Youth and life had triumphed over death.

With painful slowness, she tried to raise her hand to her head, the seat of her pain, where, though half

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paralyzed, thought was beginning to return. Her eyes wandered to and fro in the shadowy room, seeking to recognize the surroundings.

A ray of light, filtering through the window-curtains, showed her the anxious face bending tenderly over her.

"Henri!" she murmured, in a soft, plaintive voice.

That name, pronounced thus, the first word uttered after her long swoon, revealed her secret. Never had a more complete yet modest avowal been more simply expressed; was it not natural that *he* should be present at her reëntrance into life, since she loved him?

With women, the sentiment of love responds to the most diverse objects. The ordinary young girl of Zibeline's age, either before or after her sojourn in a convent, considers that a man of thirty has arrived at middle age, and that a man of forty is absolutely old. Should she accept a man of either of these ages, she does it because a fortune, a title, or high social rank silences her other tastes, and her ambition does the rest.

But, with an exceptional woman, like Mademoiselle de Vermont, brought up in view of wide horizons, in the midst of plains cleared by bold pioneers, among whom the most valorous governed the others, a man like General de Prerolles realized her ideal all the more, because both their natures presented the same striking characteristics: carelessness of danger, and frankness carried to its extremest limit. Therefore, this declaration—to use the common expression—entirely free from artifice or affectation, charmed Henri for one reason,

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yet, on the other hand, redoubled his perplexity. How could he conciliate his scruples of conscience with the aspirations of his heart? The problem seemed then as insoluble as when it had been presented the first time.

But Valentine was saved. For the moment that was the essential point, the only one in question. The involuntary revelation of her secret had brought the color to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, a smile to her lips, in spite of the leaden band that seemed still pressing upon her head.

"How you have frightened me!" said Henri, in a low voice, seating himself on the side of the bed and taking her hand.

"Is that true?" she asked, softly pressing his fingers.

"Hush!" he said, making a movement to enjoin silence.

She obeyed, and they remained a few moments thus.

Nevertheless, he reflected that the account of the accident would soon be spread everywhere, that Valentine's new friends would hear about it as soon as they arrived at the race-track that day, and that he could no longer prolong his stay beside her.

"Are you leaving me so soon?" Valentine murmured, when he said that he must go.

"I am going to tell my sister and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy of your mishap."

"Very well," she replied, as if already she had no other desire than to follow his wishes.

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He gave the necessary orders, and again took his place beside the bed, awaiting the second visit of the doctor, whose arrival was simultaneous with that of the Duchess.

* This time the verdict was altogether favorable, with no mention of the possibility of any aggravating circumstances. An inevitable feverishness, and a great lassitude, which must be met with absolute repose for several days, would be the only consequences of this dangerous prank.

The proprieties resumed their normal sway, and it was no longer possible for Henri to remain beside the charming invalid.

CHAPTER XXVII

DISTRACTION



THE Duchesse de Montgeron, who had passed the rest of the day with Mademoiselle de Vermont, did not return to her own dwelling until eight o'clock that evening, bearing the most reassuring news.

Longing for fresh air and exercise, Henri went out after dinner, walked through the Champs-Elysées, and traversed the crossing at l'Etoile, in order to approach the spot where Zibeline lay ill.

If one can imagine the feelings of a man of forty-five, who is loved for himself, under the most flattering and unexpected conditions, one can comprehend the object of this nocturnal walk and the long pause that Henri made beneath the windows of Zibeline's apartment. A small garden, protected by a light fence, was the only obstacle that separated them. But how much more insuperable was the barrier which his own principles had raised between this adorable girl and himself.

Had he not told his sister, confided to Eugénie Gontier, and reiterated to any one that would listen to him, the scruples which forbade him ever to think

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of marriage? To change this decision, in asking for the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont, would—in appearance, at least—sacrifice to the allurement of wealth the proud poverty which he had long borne so nobly.

But the demon of temptation was then, as always, lurking in the shadow, the sole witness of this duel to the death between prejudice and love.

When he returned to his rooms he found another note from his former mistress:

"You have just had a terrible experience, my dear friend. Nothing that affects you can be indifferent to me. I beg you to believe, notwithstanding the grief which our separation causes me, in all the prayers that I offer for your happiness.

"ARIADNE."

"My happiness? My torture, rather!" he said, the classic name of Ariadne suggesting the idea that the pseudonym of Tantalus might well be applied to himself.

But he had long kept a rule to write as little as possible, and was guarded in making reply to any letter, especially to such a communication as this.

When he left the house the next morning, on his way to attend to military duties, he learned that his sister had gone away early on an excursion to one of the suburbs, and that she would not return until evening. As the Duchess was the only person who had been initiated into the mystery surrounding Zibeline on the subject of the building of the Orphan Asylum, it was evident that she had gone to take her place in the directing of the work.

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In the afternoon Henri called to inquire for the invalid, and was received by the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy. She had had a quiet night; a little fever had appeared toward morning, and, above all, an extreme weakness, requiring absolute quiet and freedom from any excitement. On an open register in the reception-room were inscribed the names of all those persons who had called to express their interest in Mademoiselle de Vermont: Constantin Lénaïeff, the Lisieux, the Nointels, Edmond Delorme, the Baron de Samoreau, and others. Only the Desvanneaux had shown no sign of life. Their Christian charity did not extend so far as that.

Henri added his name to the list, and for several days he returned each morning to inscribe it anew, feeling certain that, as soon as Valentine was able to be placed half-reclining on a couch, she would give orders that he should be admitted to her presence. But nothing of the kind occurred.

On the evening of the fifth day after the accident, the Duchess informed her brother that their young friend had been taken to the country, where it was thought a complete cure would sooner be effected.

This hasty departure, made without any preliminary message, caused Henri to feel the liveliest disappointment.

Had he deceived himself, then? Was it, after all, only by chance that she had so tenderly pronounced his name, and had that familiar appellative only been drawn from her involuntarily because of her surprise at beholding his unexpected presence at her bedside?

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Regarding the matter from this point of view, the whole romance that he had constructed on a fragile foundation had really never existed save in his own imagination!

At this thought his self-esteem suffered cruelly. He felt a natural impulse to spring into a carriage and drive to the dwelling of Eugénie Gontier, and there to seek forgetfulness. But he felt that his bitterness would make itself known even there, and that such a course would be another affront to the dignity of a woman of heart, whose loyalty to himself he never had questioned.

Try to disguise it as he would, his sombre mood made itself apparent, especially to his brother-in-law, who had no difficulty in guessing the cause, without allowing Henri to suspect that he divined it.

The date for the formal transfer of the Orphan Asylum to the committee had been fixed for the fifteenth day of May.

On the evening of the fourteenth, at the hour when the General was signing the usual military documents in his bureau, a domestic presented to him a letter which, he said, had just been brought in great haste by a messenger on horseback:

The superscription, "To Monsieur the General the Marquis de Prérrolles," was inscribed in a long, English hand, elegant and regular. The orderly gave the letter to his chief, who dismissed him with a gesture before breaking the seal. The seal represented, without escutcheon or crown, a small, wild animal, with a pointed muzzle, projecting teeth, and shaggy body,

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under which was a word Henri expected to find: *Zibeline!*

The letter ran thus:

"MY DEAR GENERAL:

"An officer, like yourself, whose business it is to see that his orders are obeyed, will understand that I have not dared, even in your favor, to infringe on those imposed upon me by the doctor. But those orders have been withdrawn! If you have nothing better to do, come to-morrow, with your sister, to inspect our asylum, before Monsieur Desvanneaux takes possession of it!

"Your military eye will be able to judge immediately whether anything is lacking in the quarters. Yours affectionately,

"VALENTINE DE VERMONT.

"P.S.—Poor Seaman is dead! I beg you to carry this sad news to his friend Aida. V."

If a woman's real self is revealed in her epistolary style, finesse, good-humor, and sprightliness were characterised in this note. Zibeline's finesse had divined Henri's self-deception; her good-humor sought to dissipate it; and her sprightliness was evidenced by her allusions to M. Desvanneaux and the loss of her horse.

When they found themselves reunited at the dinner-hour, the Duchess said simply to her brother:

"You must have received an invitation to-day from Mademoiselle de Vermont. Will you accompany us to-morrow?"

"Yes, certainly. But where? How? At what hour?"

"We must leave here at one o'clock. Don't dis-

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turb yourself about any other detail—we shall look after everything."

"Good! I accept."

As he was not so curious as the Desvanneaux, it mattered little to him to what place they took him, so long as he should find Zibeline at the end of the journey.

At the appointed hour the brother and sister drove to the Gare du Nord. The Duke, a director of the road, who had been obliged to attend a convocation of the Council until noon, had preceded them. He was waiting for them beside the turnstile at the station, having already procured their tickets and reserved a carriage in one of the omnibus trains from Paris to Tréport which make stops at various suburban stations.

"Will it be a very long journey?" Henri asked, on taking his place in the carriage.

"Barely three-quarters of an hour," said the Duke, as the train started on its way.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VOW REDEEMED



HE third road, constructed between the two lines which met at Creil, passing, the one by way of Chantilly, the other, by Pontoise, was not in existence in 1871, when, after the war, Jeanne and Henri de Prérrolles went to visit the spot, already unrecognizable, where they had passed their childhood. L'Ile-d'Adam was at that time the nearest station; to day it is Presles, on the intermediate line, which they now took.

"This is our station," said Madame de Montgeron, when the train stopped at Montsoult. They descended from the carriage, and found on the platform two footmen, who conducted them to a large *char-à-banc*, to which were harnessed four dark bay Percherons, whose bridles were held by postillions in Zibeline's livery, as correct in their appearance as those belonging to the imperial stables, when the sojourn of the court was at Compiègne or at Fontainebleau.

"Where are we going now, Jeanne?" asked Henri, whose heart seemed to him to contract at the sight of Maffliers, which he knew so well.

"A short distance from here," his sister replied.

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The horses set off, and, amid the sound of bells and the cracking of whips, the carriage reached the national road from Paris to Beauvais, which, from Montsoult, passes around the railway by a rapid descent, from the summit of which is visible, on the right, the Château of Franconville; on the left, the village of Nerville perched on its crest.

One of the footmen on the rear seat held the reins, and a quarter of an hour later the carriage stopped just before arriving at the foot of Valpendant.

Valpendant had formerly been a feudal manor within the confines of Ile-de-France, built midway upon a hill, as its name indicated. On the side toward the plain was a moat, and the castle itself commanded the view of a valley, through which ran the little stream called Le Roi, which flows into the river Oise near the hamlet of Mours. Acquired in the fifteenth century by the lords of Prerolles, it had become an agricultural territory worked for their profit, first by forced labor, and later by farmers.

Even recently, the courtyard, filled with squawking fowls and domestic animals of all kinds, and the sheds crowded with agricultural implements piled up in disorder, presented a scene of confusion frequent among cultivators, and significant of the alienation of old domains from their former owners.

"We have arrived!" said the Duchess, alighting first.

"What, is it here?" Henri exclaimed, his heart beating more quickly.

"Your old farm was for sale just at the time that

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Mademoiselle de Vermont was seeking an appropriate site for the Orphan Asylum. This spot appeared to her to combine all the desirable conditions, and she has wrought the transformation you are about to behold. It might as well be this place as another," the Duchess added. "In my opinion, it is a sort of consolation offered to us by fate."

"Be it so!" said Henri, in a tone of less conviction.

He followed his sister along the footpath of a bluff, which as children they had often climbed; while the carriage made a long *détour* in order to reach the main entrance to the grounds.

The footpath, winding along near the railway embankment, ended at a bridge, where Zibeline awaited the three visitors. A significant pressure of her hand showed Henri how little cause he had had for his apprehensions.

They entered. Seen from the main entrance, the metamorphosis of the place was complete.

The old tower that had served as a barn alone remained the same; it was somewhat isolated from the other building, and had been repaired in the style of its period, making a comfortable dwelling for the future director of the Asylum. Mademoiselle de Vermont occupied it temporarily.

On each side of the grounds, standing parallel, rose two fine buildings: on the ground floor of each were all the customary rooms and accessories found on model farms; on the upper floors were dormitories arranged to receive a large number of children of both sexes. There were school-rooms, sewing-rooms, a

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chapel—in short, nothing was lacking to assist in the children's intellectual and manual education.

"You have done things royally," said the Duke to the happy donor, when, having finished the inspection of the premises, they returned to the directors' room, indicated by a plate upon its door.

As for Henri, silent and absorbed, he hesitated between the dread of facing a new emotion and the desire to go once more to gaze upon the tower of Prérolles, hardly more than two kilometres distant.

"What is the matter with you, General?" Zibeline asked, observing that he did not appear to take pleasure in the surprise she had prepared.

"I lived here many years a long time ago," he replied. "I am thinking of all that it recalls to me; and, if you would not consider it discourteous on my part, I should like to leave you for a little time to make a pilgrimage on foot around the neighborhood."

"Would you like to have me take you myself? I have a little English cart which can run about anywhere," said Zibeline.

The proposition was tempting. The sweetness of a *tête-à-tête* might diminish the bitterness of recollections. He accepted.

She ordered the cart brought around, and they climbed into the small vehicle, which was drawn by a strong pony, driven by Zibeline herself.

"Which way?" she asked, when they had passed through the gates.

"To the right," he said, pointing to a rough, half-paved slope, an abandoned part of what had been in

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former days the highway, which now joins the new road at the Beaumont tunnel.

Passing this point, and leaving on their left the state road of l'Ille-d'Adam, they drove through a narrow cross-cut, between embankments, by which one mounts directly to the high plateau that overlooks the town of Presles.

The hill was steep, and the pony was out of breath. They were compelled to stop to allow him to rest.

"It is not necessary to go any farther," said Henri to his companion. "I need only to take a few steps in order to see what interests me."

"I will wait for you here," she replied, alighting after him. "Don't be afraid to leave me alone. The horse will not move; he is used to stopping."

He left her gathering daisies, and walked resolutely to the panoramic point of view, where a strange and unexpected sight met his eyes!

All that had once been so dear to him had regained its former aspect. The kitchen-gardens had given place to the rich pastures, where yearling colts frisked gayly. The factory had disappeared, and the château had been restored to its original appearance. The walls enclosing the park had been rebuilt, and even several cleared places indicated the sites of cottages that had been pulled down.

Henri de Prérrolles could hardly believe his eyes! Was he the sport of a dream or of one of those mirages which rise before men who travel across the sandy African deserts? The latitude and the position of the sun forbade this interpretation. But whence came

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it, then? What fairy had turned a magic ring in order to work this miracle?

A crackling of dry twigs under a light tread made him turn, and he beheld Zibeline, who had come up behind him.

The fairy was there, pale and trembling, like a criminal awaiting arrest.

"Is it you who have done this?" Henri exclaimed, with a sob which no human strength could have controlled.

"It is I!" she murmured, lowering her eyes. "I did it in the hope that some day you would take back that which rightfully belongs to you."

"Rightfully, you say? By what act?"

"An act of restitution."

"You never have done me any injury, and nothing authorizes me to accept such a gift from Mademoiselle de Vermont."

"Vermont was the family name of my mother. When my father married her, he obtained leave to add it to his own. I am the daughter of Paul Landry."

"You!"

"Yes. The daughter of Paul Landry, whose fortune had no other origin than the large sum of which he despoiled you."

Henri made a gesture of denial.

"Pardon me!" Zibeline continued. "He was doubly your debtor, since this sum had been increased ten-fold when you rescued him from the Mexicans who were about to shoot him. 'This is my revenge!' you said to him, without waiting to hear a word from

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him. Your ruin was the remorse of his whole life. I knew it only when he lay upon his deathbed. Otherwise——”

She paused, then raised her head higher to finish her words.

“Never mind!” she went on. “That which he dared not do while living, I set myself to do after his death. When I came to Paris to inquire what had become of the Marquis de Prérollés, your glorious career answered for you; but even before I knew you I had become the possessor of these divided estates, which, reunited by me, must be restored to your hands. You are proud, Henri,” she added, with animation, “but I am none less proud than you. Judge, then, what I have suffered in realizing our situation: I, overwhelmed with riches, you, reduced to your officer’s pay. Is that a satisfaction to your pride? Very well! But to my own, it is the original stain, which only a restitution, nobly accepted by you, ever can efface!”

She paused, looking at him supplicatingly, her hands clasped. As he remained silent, she understood that he still hesitated, and continued:

“To plead my cause, to vanquish your resistance, as I am trying now to triumph over it, could be attempted with any chance of success only by a dear and tender friend; that is the reason why I sought to establish relations with——”

“With Eugénie Gontier?”

“But she would not consent to it—all the worse for her! For, since then, you and I have come to know each other well. Your prejudices have been over-

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come one by one. I have observed it well. I am a woman, and even your harshness has not changed my feelings, nor prevented me from believing that, in spite of yourself, you were beginning to love me. Have I been deceiving myself?—tell me!"

"You know that you have not, since, as I look at you and listen to you, I know not which I admire more—your beauty or the treasures of your heart!"

"Then come!"

"Whither?"

"To Prérolles, where all is ready to receive you."

"Well, since this is a tale from the Arabian Nights, let us follow it to the end! I will go!" said Henri.

Browsing beside the road, the pony, left to himself, had advanced toward them, step by step, whinnying to his mistress. Valentine and Henri remounted the cart, which soon drew up before the gates of the château, where, awaiting them, reinstated in his former office, stood the old steward, bent and white with years.

The borders of the broad driveway were of a rich, deep green. Rose-bushes in full bloom adorned the smooth lawns. The birds trilled a welcome in jumping from branch to branch, and across the façade of the château the open windows announced to the surrounding peasantry the return of the prodigal master.

At the top of the flight of steps Valentine stepped back to allow Henri to pass before her; then, changing her mind, she advanced again.

"No, you are at home," she said. "It is I that must enter first!"

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He followed her docilely, caring no longer to yield to any other will than hers.

Within the château, thanks to the complicity of the Duchess, the furnishings resembled as closely as possible those of former days. The good fairy had completed successfully two great works: the restoration of the château and the building of the asylum. The inhabitants of the one would be so much the better able to foresee the needs of the other.

Having explored one of the wings, they returned to the central hall. Mademoiselle de Vermont made a sign to the steward to remain there, and beckoned to Henri to accompany her to the historic gallery. After they had entered it, she closed the door. The family portraits had been rehung in their former places, in chronological order, and, in its proper place, figured that of the General of Division the Marquis de Prérolles, in full uniform, mounted on Aïda, the portrait being the work of Edmond Delorme.

At this sight, touched to the depths of his heart, Henri knelt before Valentine, and carried her hand to his lips.

“I adore you!” he said, without attempting to hide the tears of gratitude that fell upon those generous hands.

“Do you, indeed?” Zibeline murmured.

“You shall see!” he replied, rising. “Come, in your turn.”

He led her before the portrait of the ancestral marshal of France, and said:

“Twenty-three years ago I vowed before that por-

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trait either to vanquish the enemy or to regain with honor all that I had lost at play. I have kept my word. Will you be my wife?"

"Ah, you know my heart is yours!" Zibeline whispered, hiding her face upon his shoulder.

The door at the end of the gallery opened; the Duc and the Duchesse de Montgeron appeared. Henri took Zibeline's hand and approached them.

"The Marquise de Prerolles!" he said, presenting her to his sister and her husband.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MARQUISE DE PREROLLES



HE next day a special train landed the fair patronesses at the station of Presles, whence Zibeline's carriages conducted them to Valpendant.

The deed of gift was signed before M. Durand and his colleague, a notary of Pontoise.

This formality fulfilled, M. Desvanneaux, whose own *rôle*, for a moment overshadowed, appeared to him to renew its importance, took the floor and said:

“It remains to us, Mesdames, to assure the support of the Orphan Asylum by means of an annual income.”

“The Marquis and the Marquise de Prerolles assume this responsibility,” said the ministerial officer, treasurer of the Asylum. “This mutual engagement will form the object of a special clause in the drawing up of their contract.”

In this way was the news of the approaching marriage between Valentine and Henri announced to the Society.

“The little intriguer!” murmured the churchwarden, nudging the elbow of his Mægera.

The General, who noted the effect which this an-

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nouncement had produced upon the peevish pair, divined the malicious words upon the hypocritical lips. He drew the husband aside, and put one hand upon his shoulder.

"Desvanneaux," he said, "you have known me twenty-five years, and you know that I am a man of my word. If ever a malevolent word from you regarding my wife should come to my ears, I shall elongate yours to such a degree that those of King Midas will be entirely eclipsed! Remember that!"

The ceremony took place six weeks later, in the church of St. Honoré-d'Eylau, which was not large enough to hold the numerous public and the brilliant corps of officers that assisted.

The witnesses for the bridegroom were the military governor of Paris and the Duc de Montgeron. Those of the bride were the aide-de-camp General Lénaïff, in full uniform, wearing an astrachan cap and a white cloak with the Russian eagle fastened in the fur; and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.

On the evening before, a last letter from his former mistress had come to the General:

"I have heard all the details of your romance, my dear Henri. Its conclusion is according to all dramatic rules, and I congratulate you without reserve.

"If, on the eve of contracting this happy union, an examination of your conscience should suggest to you some remorse for having abandoned me so abruptly, let me say that no shadow, not even the lightest, must cloud the serenity of this joyous day: I am about to leave the stage forever, to become the wife of the Baron de Samoreau! Always affectionately yours,

"EUGÉNIE GONTIER."

A TURN OF LUCK

A Comedy in One Act

BY

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

TRANSLATED BY

D. KNOWLTON RANOUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FENIMORE, *a fashionable dressmaker.*

GASTON DE MONTLOUIS.

BENOIT, *a bookkeeper.*

LOUISE, *forewoman at Fenimore's shop.*

THE MARQUISE DE LÉTORIÈRES.

MRS. BROWN.

AGATHA, *assistant at Fenimore's.*

A TURN OF LUCK

(SCENE: *Business office in the establishment of a fashionable dressmaker. Wide door c. Practicable doors R. and L. Near R. 1 E. stands a dummy female figure, dressed in a bright-colored ball-gown. Opposite this figure stands a writing-desk, covered with account-books and papers. Large table R. 2 E., holding pasteboard boxes, which are half open, revealing glimpses of rich materials. At curtain, BENOIT, the bookkeeper, is discovered writing at the desk. The chair on which he is seated has a round leather cushion in the form of a ring.*)

SCENE I

FENIMORE (*enters, c.*)

Well, Monsieur Benoit, is the balance sheet ready?

BENOIT

I shall have it finished in a moment, master.

FENIMORE

I have told you many times not to call me "master"! At the big bake-shops and confectioners' such a phrase is well enough; but when you address the most distinguished dressmaker in Paris, who has his own establishment in the Rue de la Paix, I prefer to have you say, "Yes, Monsieur Horse; no, Monsieur Horse."

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BENOIT

Your wish is sufficient, Monsieur Horse.

FENIMORE

No!—Wait! Let me think! Henceforth you must address me by my familiar name—my pet-name—the name used by all the ladies—Monsieur Fenimore.

BENOIT

Did your godfather give you that name in baptism, Monsieur?

FENIMORE

Yes, faith! The only godfather I ever had—myself! I am the godson of my own efforts, Monsieur Benoit. Having cut out my own path in life, and being known as the great *coupeur*, my first name—Fenimore—seems almost to have been invented for me: “Fenimore, *Coupeur!*” It recalls the great American romancer, whose fair compatriots I adorn with silks and satins.

BENOIT

But only after our New York correspondent has assured us of their solvency.

FENIMORE

Of course! Otherwise I should often be cheated.

BENOIT

And you would not do so prosperous a business as this year's has been.

FENIMORE (*approaches desk*)

Come, let us see how the accounts stand.

A TURN OF LUCK

BENOIT (*reads*)

Net profit in the bank, 298,000 francs, without counting certain expenditures.

FENIMORE

Of which the total is—

BENOIT

118,000 francs, distributed as follows: High life, 62,000 francs; the artistic world, 31,000; the demi-monde, 25,000. None of these sums exceeds sensibly the usual amount set aside for such expenditures.
(*Hands paper to FENIMORE*)

FENIMORE (*after glancing at paper*)

Very good!—I am well satisfied with you. Beginning to-day, you will at once set about making collections on outstanding debts.

BENOIT (*straightening his papers*)

Ah, I ask nothing better! That will be some relief from sitting all day long. (*Rises*) Oh!

FENIMORE

What is the matter?

BENOIT (*crosses stage to get his hat*)

Nothing. I only got up too quickly; but, thank heaven, now that I am up I have wings, and I fly—

FENIMORE (*detains him*)

One moment!

BENOIT

Do you wish to verify the account?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

FENIMORE

That is unnecessary; I have perfect confidence in you, the proof of which is that I am about to confide to you a secret. Sit down.

BENOIT

Again?

FENIMORE

Yes, it is indispensable. In all the tragedies the confidant must always be seated when he listens to an august personage. Take Cinna, for example.

BENOIT (*hangs up his hat*)

Very well. I will listen. (*Sits again*) Oh!

FENIMORE

What is the matter now?

BENOIT

Nothing. I sat down too quickly. But now that I am down I am a fixture, and I am all ears.

FENIMORE

This is the secret. Monsieur Benoit, you know quite well that I have here a treasure—

BENOIT

I should think so, indeed, since I hold the key to it.

FENIMORE

I do not speak of that sort of treasure, but of her who is the source of it—or rather, who is the prime mover in acquiring it. Think!—among all my workwomen, who is the prime mover?

A TURN OF LUCK

BENOIT

Mademoiselle Louise.

FENIMORE

You have named her! Benoit, you have named the adroit and intelligent fairy whose exquisite taste has made my house the first of its kind in the world. That is the reason why I have resolved to pin her to myself, so to speak.

BENOIT

By giving her an interest in the business?

FENIMORE

Better than that. By marrying her.

BENOIT

You, my lord!

FENIMORE

Yes, I, my lord! You said that exactly in the manner of an actor at the Comédie Française!

BENOIT

You did not understand me. I meant—you—good heavens!—you do not dream of it!

FENIMORE

And why not?

BENOIT

Because one does not need magic spectacles to see that Mademoiselle Louise is a princess in disguise, who either was changed in the cradle or over whom some bad fairy has thrown a spell which will not be broken until Prince Charming shall come to disenchant her.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

FENIMORE

Ah, well—precisely! *I will be Prince Charming.*

BENOIT

You!

FENIMORE

Certainly. It appears to me that from head to foot I am altogether——

BENOIT

Get along with you! You wear varnished boots, that's true enough—but they haven't red heels! And as to your head—even were that surmounted by a crown, no one would ever take you for a prince, not even a prince of the Balkans. Here, take this and crown yourself! (*Rises and hands to FENIMORE the round leather cushion*)

FENIMORE (*rises, comes down c.*)

There, that will do! I did not raise you to the dignity of being my confidant to be compelled to listen to disagreeable things. That is contrary to all custom.

BENOIT (*comes down c.*)

Disagreeable things, you say—just because I said that you have not the air and manner of a Russian prince! Ah, if you looked like Monsieur de Montlouis, that would be another matter!

FENIMORE

Monsieur de Montlouis, the devoted friend of Ma-demoiselle Métella? That young man who never leaves the naughty little beauty, even when she comes here to try on her gowns?

A TURN OF LUCK

BENOIT

More particularly not when she comes here to try on her gowns! Ah, you must have a bit of *crêpe de chine* over your eyes, not to see that Métella is only a pretext, and that it is your forewoman with whom Monsieur de Montlouis is in love.

FENIMORE

It can't be possible!

BENOIT

Certainly. It is perfectly true. I can see better than you, through my little leather ring!

FENIMORE

And do you believe that there is an understanding between them?

BENOIT

Not at all! Mademoiselle Louise is far too proud for that. Only, some day or other, Métella will perceive how matters stand, and when that day comes, there will be a fine row in the shop. That's all. Now, I'm going out to collect. (*Attempts to get his hat*)

FENIMORE (*detains him*)

No—sit down again!

BENOIT (*annoyed*)

What! Again?

FENIMORE

Yes, to assist me in sounding the depths of this angel's soul, and to draw up a report of the same.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

BENOIT (*seizes his hat angrily*)

You want me to act as stenographer now, eh? Had I known that that would prevent me from going out, I should have said nothing. (*Sits again*) Oh!

Enter LOUISE

FENIMORE

Silence! She is here! Ah, here you are, Mademoiselle Louise!

SCENE II

LOUISE

I have just come in, Monsieur. I have been at the Hôtel Continental to take the order of that rich American lady——

FENIMORE

Whose solvency our New York correspondent guarantees?

BENOIT (*shows telegram*)

By the transatlantic cable: "Mistress Brown, widow, six hundred thousand dollars' income."

LOUISE

Mrs. Brown, Monsieur Benoit! In English they say *Missis* for Mistress.

FENIMORE (*to BENOIT*)

Aha! What an education, eh? She has been taught in the best schools, that's plain to be seen.

A TURN OF LUCK

LOUISE

Unfortunately, the lady was not in. I left a message begging that she would be good enough to call at our place some time during the day. Then I went to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to see the Marquise de Létoirières, who had asked me to call, but who could not receive me, as she was presiding at a meeting of a charity organization. In short, I have lost a whole morning—a thing that does not often happen to me.

FENIMORE

And had you any disagreeable encounters on the way?

LOUISE

Disagreeable encounters at one o'clock in the afternoon?

FENIMORE

Oh, I don't mean thieves or pickpockets, but—followers—mashers—of whom the Rue de la Paix furnishes plenty of examples. They even say that high-born gentlemen, like Montlouis, do not hesitate to follow a well-made leg in a neat stocking! (*Aside to Benoit*) That was a Machiavellian stroke, eh?

LOUISE

Dear me, Monsieur! if that is true, I have had no time to observe it. I hurried back in order to give the finishing touch to this gown. (*Approaches dummy, removes skirt from it, and sits down to work*)

FENIMORE

That is Mademoiselle Métella's costume, is it not?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

LOUISE

Yes, and it must be finished this evening.

FENIMORE

She wishes to wear it at the artists' ball, in company with Monsieur de Montlouis. (*Aside*) She started! (*To BENOIT:*) Did you notice that she started at the name? (*Aloud*) Don't you think Monsieur de Montlouis has very bad taste, Monsieur Benoit?

BENOIT

Not at all! Métella is a superb creature.

FENIMORE (*displays gown*)

Yes, but she is too fond of wearing all colors of the rainbow, and her choice of parrot-like plumage may reflect upon the good taste of my establishment.

LOUISE

That would be easy to avoid, Monsieur. You have only to decline to make Mademoiselle's costumes.

FENIMORE.

Oh, that can not be thought of! A client who spends in my establishment more than a hundred thousand francs a year! No, it would be better that some person —some one who is kindly disposed and sympathetic—should consult privately with Monsieur de Montlouis, in order to correct, so far as possible, this tendency toward bad taste. You, for instance, Mademoiselle Louise.

LOUISE (*drops her work*)

I, Monsieur? Really, during the last few moments

A TURN OF LUCK

it has seemed to be your pleasure to allude to certain things to which it is displeasing for any young woman to listen who has a regard for her own dignity. I will not deny that among your patrons there are some that I prefer to others. But if it is my duty to serve every one with the same courtesy, it is also my right to remain a stranger to those whom I do not wish to know.

BENOIT (*aside*)

Caught!

FENIMORE (*aside*)

I have gone too far! (*Aloud*) Excuse me, Mademoiselle Louise. There is not an hour of the day in which I do not sing your praises; but, you know, on the day when we make up our trial balances, we always feel a bit nervous—isn't that true, Benoit?

BENOIT

Yes, and when we sit too long we get stiff-jointed!

FENIMORE (*to LOUISE*)

You are not vexed with me?

LOUISE

You must see that I am not, since I am going on with my work. (*Knock heard*)

FENIMORE

Come in!

M. DE MONTLOUIS (*enters, c.*)

It is I!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

FENIMORE

Monsieur de Montlouis! (*Aside*) She blushes!
(*Aside to BENOIT*) See how she blushes!

SCENE III

M. DE MONTLOUIS (*stands at door, c.*)

Will you allow me to penetrate into the sanctuary?

FENIMORE

Oh, Monsieur! I beg that you will enter.

M. DE MONTLOUIS (*comes down c.*)

I will tell you the object of my visit, Monsieur Fenimore. Mademoiselle Métella has requested me to step in here for a moment, and to ask, in case it is necessary to make any further alterations, whether she may count upon having her new costume to wear this evening.

FENIMORE (*aside to BENOIT*)

Easy enough to see through that! (*Aloud*) You must ask Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Comte. (*Aside*) For he *is* a count, the Lovelace!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

You do not reply, Mademoiselle.

BENOIT (*aside to FENIMORE*)

See how he looks at her!

LOUISE

Promptness is the rule of the house, Monsieur. Whatever happens, the gown will be ready at midnight.

A TURN OF LUCK

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Yes, but after it is delivered, its owner will not be ready until long after that—though I would willingly console myself elsewhere. Certainly, with all these bright clouds of fluffs and frills, the wearer will not fail to create a sensation.

FENIMORE

In which, perhaps, Monsieur would not be sorry to share!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Oh, as for that, if I could plead a convenient headache, or a prolonged game of baccarat, I would withdraw altogether from the affair.

BENOIT (*to FENIMORE*)

You see that he is not much infatuated with Métella.

LOUISE

However, if the costume is a success, perhaps Monsieur would regret that he had had no share in it.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Very true, Mademoiselle. I observe now that the decoration of this robe is charming, and I ask pardon for having wounded the pride of its designer.

LOUISE

By no means, Monsieur! These gentlemen will tell you that I make no pretenses, and that I care nothing for compliments.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

M. DE MONTLOUIS

It would be easy for me to assure myself of that, if you would let me take your hand for a moment.

LOUISE (*astonished*)

My hand!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Yes. I am somewhat of a magician, and I will wager that I can read its lines as readily as Desbarolles himself.

FENIMORE

Indeed! I am very curious to see something of that kind.

BENOIT (*rises*)

And I, too

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Well, it makes no difference; I will begin with these gentlemen. (*Puts down his hat*)

FENIMORE (*extends his open palm*)

Do you see a turn of luck there, Monsieur? Look! Read it, if you please! It has a good margin, eh?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

It is a superb volume, indeed.

BENOIT

Bound in calf.

FENIMORE (*withdraws hand*)

What? In calf?

A TURN OF LUCK

M. DE MONTLOUIS

In morocco, let us say—that is more elegant.

FENIMORE

Oh, very well! Now let us hear. (*Extends hand*)

M. DE MONTLOUIS

I will begin. You have a jovial disposition—

FENIMORE

Yes, that's true! And what else?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

You have a positive and logical mind, but are somewhat vain.

FENIMORE

Do you really believe that?

BENOIT

Not a doubt of it! But what is his principal trait?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Domestic economy strongly marked, but he has a good heart.

FENIMORE

I carry my heart in my hand, eh?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

As to this large blue line—

FENIMORE

Pardon me!—that is a vein.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Exactly. You are a good fellow when you are in the vein!

FENIMORE

Oh, admirable, Monsieur! Now it is your turn, Benoit.

BENOIT (*approaches M. DE MONTLOUIS*)

There, Monsieur le Comte! (*Extends hand.*) Can you read anything on a hand that is covered with ink-stains?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Certainly; they only set it off more plainly.

BENOIT

Very well, then—go on.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

I will begin. You have probity of character, are fastidious, subtle, but rather obstinate.

FENIMORE

Yes, he is all that! What more?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

You have a passionate, nervous temperament, eager for air and exercise, but you are very much restrained from enjoying them by reason of prolonged sedentary habits, which has brought about some congestion.

BENOIT

Why, you are a regular sorcerer!

A TURN OF LUCK

FENIMORE

No, your little leather cushion has told him that.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Now it is your turn, Mademoiselle. But reassure yourself. In your case the only moral I draw will be in jest.

LOUISE

Very well. But be careful what you say, Monsieur. I am very impressionable. (*Holds out her hand*)

BENOIT (*aside to FENIMORE*)

All that business with us was done simply to lead up to this!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Here is a hand that was not made to work with the needle, and in the line of childhood there is a mysterious something hidden, which not all my scientific skill is able to penetrate. This line indicates moral rectitude, and that line shows great force of will drawn from an act of the most noble abnegation. Am I right?

LOUISE

That is my secret. And the line of the future?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

There it is. At first it is oblique, hesitating, but suddenly it becomes clear and straight, after several changes. The future holds in reserve for you great compensations, as a reparation for the trials of the past. Have faith in the sincere conviction of a magician who

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

may not appear imposing, but whose intuition has rarely deceived him.

FENIMORE (*to Benoit*)
Charlatan, away with you!

LOUISE

I thank you for the horoscope, Monsieur, but I have no illusions, and I think that the wisest thing I can do is to return with resignation to my needle.

FENIMORE (*aside*)
Like Jenny, the workwoman, of tender memory!

SCENE IV

(Enter AGATHA)

AGATHA
Monsieur Fenimore, a lady wishes to speak to you.

FENIMORE
I know. A young American——

AGATHA
No, a French lady, middle-aged, but of a very distinguished appearance. Here is her card.

FENIMORE
Give it to me. (*Reads*) The Marquise de Létorières. Show her in. (*Exit AGATHA*)

M. DE MONTLOUIS
The Marquise de Létorières! My aunt! The devil!

A TURN OF LUCK

She passes most of her time in lecturing me on my duty to marry, and if she finds me here she'll make a great scene.

BENOIT

Well, that would be very amusing.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

For you, yes, but not for me. I must go at once, Monsieur Fenimore. Don't trouble yourself to accompany me—I know the way. Mademoiselle, your servant! *(Bows and exit)*

FENIMORE

Sit down, Monsieur Benoit.

BENOIT

What, again?

FENIMORE

Certainly, to take the lady's order.

AGATHA (*reënters and announces*)

Madame the Marquise de Létorières! *(Exit)*

SCENE V

THE MARQUISE (*enters*)

Good-day!

FENIMORE (*aside*)

Ah, these great ladies! What an air they have!

LOUISE

I regret that Madame la Marquise has taken the

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

trouble to inconvenience herself, but did no one inform her that I called upon her this morning in obedience to her request?

THE MARQUISE

I know that you took that long and fatiguing trip, my child, and I am surprised to find you standing, in spite of the petition which Monsieur Fenimore must have received.

FENIMORE

A petition! What petition?

THE MARQUISE

A petition from my committee, endeavoring to obtain a guaranty that all shopgirls henceforth may remain seated while they work, in order that these young women may not be afflicted with certain undesirable effects that come from standing all day.

FENIMORE

I have as yet received no such petition, Madame. But the moment your committee demands it, each young woman in my place shall have her own numbered armchair. (*Aside to BENOIT*) Displease our clients? Never! (*To LOUISE*) Sit down immediately, Mademoiselle Louise!

BENOIT

It may be possible! (*Rises*) Then, should the necessity arise, would Madame la Marquise be willing to sign an inverse petition?

THE MARQUISE

What do you mean, my friend?

A TURN OF LUCK

BENOIT (*crosses to MARQUISE*)

A petition in behalf of bookkeepers who are cramped by long sitting, for the suppression of chairs and for the necessary conveniences to enable them to write standing.

THE MARQUISE

The moment that the bookkeepers' health demands such action, the charitable ladies over whom I have the honor to preside will take up this new duty.

BENOIT

In that case, the brotherhood will erect a statue to you, Madame la Marquise.

FENIMORE

Very good, Monsieur Benoit. You shall have a tall desk. Go and order one—I won't keep you any longer.

BENOIT (*aside, takes his hat*)

Now I'm off! (*Aloud*) Yes, a statue, Madame, with this inscription: "To their benefactress, from the grateful martyrs to the leather cushions."

FENIMORE (*pushes him out*)

Get along with you, gabbler!

BENOIT (*at the door*)

We thank thee, Providence! (*Exit. FENIMORE shuts the door after him*)

FENIMORE

I ask your pardon for the familiarities of my employé, but he is really a very good, honest fellow. He might be surrounded by the most rascally intrigues,

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

but he would always come out of any affair with clean hands. (*Offers seat to MARQUISE*)

THE MARQUISE (*sits*)

Well, that is certainly high praise.

SCENE VI

AGATHA (*enters quickly*)

Monsieur Fenimore, Her Majesty the Queen of Spain requests that you will come at once to her carriage to speak to her.

THE MARQUISE

The Queen of Spain! Really! I offer you my congratulations!

FENIMORE

Yes, she is one of my best clients—will you excuse me, Madame la Marquise?

THE MARQUISE

Oh, of course—for a crowned head!

AGATHA

Pray hasten, Monsieur, a crowd is gathering on the sidewalk.

FENIMORE

All the better. Take Madame's order, Mademoiselle Louise. (*LOUISE rises*) The Queen of Spain standing like a sentry at my door! A paragraph for the newspapers! Decidedly the Marquis was right in his reading—I have a turn of luck. (*Exit*)

A TURN OF LUCK

SCENE VII

LOUISE

What would you like to see, Madame? A ball-gown, a lace mantle, a fur coat? The blue fox is very fashionable this winter.

THE MARQUISE

It is not a question of a blue fox—

LOUISE

An entire trousseau, perhaps? So much the better! Troussdeaux are one of the specialties of the house.

THE MARQUISE

A trousseau—well, possibly—later, if my plan succeeds. Meantime, I wish to speak of my nephew, Gaston de Montlouis.

LOUISE

Ah!

THE MARQUISE

He always comes here with a certain young woman, does he not?

LOUISE

I do not know, Madame.

THE MARQUISE

Good! I understand—a professional secret.

LOUISE

Well—yes! Besides, there are certain questions to which it is embarrassing to respond.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE MARQUISE

This embarrassment does you honor, Mademoiselle. But first, sit down. It is not at the time when my committee has sent me here to petition that you may be allowed to work seated, that I should make you stand while listening to me.

LOUISE

As you please, Madame. (*Sits*)

THE MARQUISE (*sits*)

Moreover, it is easy to see that you have received an education superior to your present condition.

LOUISE

That is almost the same remark that Monsieur de Montlouis made a short time ago when he was telling my fortune.

THE MARQUISE

Ah, you see you have admitted that he does come here!

LOUISE

True, Madame—I forgot myself.

THE MARQUISE

Do not apologize. I, too, am a bit of a magician, and if you will help me in giving a turn to the fairy ring——

LOUISE

In what way, Madame?

THE MARQUISE

It is very simple. Although dominated at present by a coarse and mercenary creature, my nephew has a

A TURN OF LUCK

heart that is easily captivated; it is necessary to find some one who shall attract his fancy—give him a change, so to speak.

LOUISE

And have you chosen me to play this flattering *rôle*, Madame?

THE MARQUISE

Indirectly, you understand. For, should you intervene personally, the contrast between this woman and yourself would be so much to your advantage that the remedy—

LOUISE

Would be worse than the disease? Was that what you meant to imply?

THE MARQUISE

Undoubtedly. But if you remain platonically in the background—

LOUISE

My honor will run no danger! I understand! Speak, then. I am curious to know how I can serve you.

THE MARQUISE

In this way. My committee and I, always in search of funds for our works of charity, are forever on the track of rich foreigners who may be visiting Paris.

LOUISE

In order to be the first to welcome them?

THE MARQUISE

That is very natural—it is quite a concurrence! Now, at our meeting this morning, our agent informed us that

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

at the Hôtel Continental a very handsome young widow has arrived. She is a millionaire, and we know that one of the first things she did after her arrival here was to enlist the services of Monsieur Fenimore.

LOUISE

That is quite true. She is Mrs. Brown, of New York. Your informant has made no mistake, Madame, for I myself was sent to take the lady's order.

THE MARQUISE

But she had already gone out, eh? Now, as I am aware that Monsieur Fenimore never deals with any one without knowing what he is about, I thought that possibly, notwithstanding your regard for professional secrets, you would not refuse to tell me how large this lady's fortune is supposed to be.

LOUISE

And if it is sufficiently large, and if the lady's charms are in proportion, I presume that these facts will warrant an *honorable* courtship on the part of Monsieur de Montlouis!

THE MARQUISE

Exactly! You have hit upon the truth at the first guess.

LOUISE

But all this has nothing to do with charity.

THE MARQUISE

Pardon me! True charity begins at home!

A TURN OF LUCK

LOUISE

Yes, I understand! Well, then, be satisfied, Madame! Mrs. Brown's fortune yields her six hundred thousand dollars' income.

THE MARQUISE

In our money, three million francs! Magnificent!

LOUISE (*rises*)

Now, I think that is all you desired to know, Madame.

THE MARQUISE

Not quite. There is still another matter——

LOUISE

What, is my part not yet finished, then?

THE MARQUISE

Certainly not. The most important scene yet remains to be played—the great scene, as they say on the stage.

LOUISE

But I am not taking part in a comedy, Madame.

THE MARQUISE

Oh, don't be alarmed! It is only a little bit of diplomacy I ask of you. If I have been correctly informed, this lady will soon call here. All that I wish you to do, while Mademoiselle Métella is trying on her robe, is to see that that operation is prolonged as much as possible.

LOUISE

Ah, I see! You wish me to do this in order that

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

M. de Montlouis may meet Mrs. Brown, and to give the six hundred thousand dollars time to produce their effect.

THE MARQUISE

No, in that you are mistaken. My nephew is not mercenary in the least. Quite the contrary! He is a species of Don Quixote, capable of marrying a poor girl providing that she pleased him, and for the sake of playing to the gallery.

LOUISE (*starts*)

Ah!

THE MARQUISE

Oh, yes, indeed! But, thank heaven, no such danger threatens. (*Rises*) So, now, everything is understood, is it? I may count on your Christian sentiment in helping me save this soul from the claws of the devil, may I not?

LOUISE

Be satisfied, Madame. If the matter depends upon me—

THE MARQUISE

Oh, thank you! I will call again soon to follow up the effect of my little scheme. Good-day, Mademoiselle. (*Going*)

LOUISE

You—you have forgotten to give me your order, Madame.

THE MARQUISE

Oh, never mind! I don't need anything this morning. Good-day! (*Exit*)

A TURN OF LUCK

LOUISE

A fine thing—charity! It appears to be more practical than palmistry!

SCENE VIII

FENIMORE (*enters*)

Decidedly, I am in my best vein to-day! (*Looks at memorandum-book in his hand*) The Queen has ordered twenty-four costumes to be worn in one week that she will pass at Saint Sebastien. Give me a monarchy to make custom good! And the Marquise—what did she order?

LOUISE

Nothing at all.

FENIMORE

I am not surprised—that is just like her. She says that she economizes to spite the Republic, but if we had a king to-morrow she would not buy so much as a new petticoat!

AGATHA (*enters*)

Mademoiselle Métella is waiting in the reception-room to try on her gown.

LOUISE

I am coming. (*Exit AGATHA, carrying dummy figure*)

FENIMORE

You know, Métella is somewhat lacking in the proper curves here and there—eh?—but as she is a good customer, you would better not appear to notice that, eh?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

LOUISE

I will do my best, Monsieur. (*Exit*)

FENIMORE (*alone*)

She knows her business, that little fairy; and if she ever leaves me, my house will go to pieces, I fear. Now, then—I will write down the order of Her Majesty with my own hand! (*Sits at table*)

SCENE IX

BENOIT (*enters*)

Well, that's done—I have ordered my new desk.

FENIMORE (*writes in his memorandum book*)

What desk?

BENOIT

Why, the desk you told me to order, so that I can write standing. Just fancy!—the joiner asks for a fortnight in which to make it! But meantime the sacristan of the Madeleine has promised to lend me his lectern. It is very tall, and reminds one of Boileau, and the chants sung at it on Sundays at the hour for high mass.

FENIMORE

Well, we shall not expect you to do that.

BENOIT

Of course not, but I wish to tell you that on coming back to get the statements I need in collecting— There! I forgot! You know that rich American lady?

FENIMORE

Yes; what about her?

A TURN OF LUCK

BENOIT

She is out there, in the reception-room, waiting for some one to attend to her.

FENIMORE (*rises hastily*)

What! A client of such importance! Bring her in here, quick!

BENOIT (*speaks off at door, R.*)

Will Madame take the trouble to step this way? She is now favored with her turn.

(Enter MRS. BROWN)

FENIMORE (*aside*)

By Jove! What a pretty woman!

MRS. BROWN

Favored with my turn, eh?—just as if this were a dentist's parlor! Oh, I see—I understand! (*Opens purse, and hands bill to Benoit*) Here, my gentleman!

BENOIT

I am not a gentleman, Madame, but I will take it all the same. (*Aside*) A hundred francs! Good gracious! (*Exit*)

SCENE X

FENIMORE (*bows low*)

Madame!

MRS. BROWN (*with a slight American accent*)

Ah—Monsieur Fenimore, I think?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

FENIMORE

Yes. Fenimore, *coupur*—like your illustrious compatriot—yes, my lady.

MRS. BROWN

Oh, no, not “my lady”! Mrs. Brown, *née* Simson.

FENIMORE

What! The daughter of the famous banker, celebrated for his colossal failure?

MRS. BROWN

Which permitted him to build up another fortune, of which I am the sole heiress?—yes, Monsieur Fenimore.

FENIMORE

How they rebound, these Americans!

MRS. BROWN

Yes, indeed—just like a lawn-tennis ball! As for my references, here is my letter of credit on the house of Rothschild Brothers, of Paris—you know them?

FENIMORE

Know them? Why, Madame, I dress all their wives. I may add that if Madame wishes to give me *carte blanche* she shall leave my hands wearing only the very latest fashions. (*Offers her a chair*)

MRS. BROWN (*sits*)

Well, I give you *carte blanche*, Monsieur.

FENIMORE (*strikes a small bell*)

Thank you, Madame! (*Aside*) Oh, but I will make her clothes cling to her like a soft suède glove!

A TURN OF LUCK

SCENE XI

AGATHA (*enters*)

Did Monsieur ring?

FENIMORE

Yes. Tell the forewoman to finish soon with Mademoiselle Métella, and then to come here at once.

AGATHA

Yes, Monsieur. (*Exit*)

SCENE XII

FENIMORE

Will Madame be good enough to wait one minute?

MRS. BROWN

Oh, yes, I am not in haste. I beg that you will be seated yourself, Monsieur Fenimore.

FENIMORE

With pleasure! (*Aside*) She is a millionaire, but she is not proud. She has all the good qualities. (*Sits*)

MRS. BROWN

Tell me, Monsieur Fenimore, you are well acquainted with all Paris, are you not?

FENIMORE

I am—both before and behind the scenes, Madame. Neither region has anything that is hidden from me. (*Aside*) She has come here in search of another husband, that is evident!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

MRS. BROWN

Then one may safely apply to you for any information?

FENIMORE (*aside*)

This seems favorable. Now I will try to hand over my rival to her; that would relieve me greatly. (*Aloud*) Certainly, Madame. I know, at this moment, a very accomplished young man, who is even a most clever magician.

MRS. BROWN

Magician? Oh, yes—like Rhotomago, you mean.

FENIMORE

Yes, but of a very different station in life. He is the Comte de Montlouis.

MRS. BROWN

The Comte de Montlouis. Oh, no, not that.

FENIMORE

I understand. The title is not sufficiently sounding. With Madame's fortune, she seeks a duke, no doubt.

MRS. BROWN

A duke? Oh, no, not at all. I am trying to find a young woman, Monsieur.

FENIMORE

A young woman? And why?

MRS. BROWN

In order to discover her address, which I have not been able to find in society. Mademoiselle de la Roche-Landry——

A TURN OF LUCK

FENIMORE

De la Roche-Landry? Don't know her. It must be an extinct family.

MRS. BROWN

No, not extinct, but ruined, Monsieur. Ruined by the failure of Simson and Company.

FENIMORE

As were so many others!

MRS. BROWN

Yes, but the others—well, I am not concerned with them. But as for this young woman—her loss was through my own personal fault.

FENIMORE

I can guess how. A childhood friend. Her father confided to yours his daughter's fortune, and as he did *not* rebound from the blows of misfortune, he probably died in poverty.

MRS. BROWN

Exactly! But I have come to France expressly to repair this wrong, Monsieur.

FENIMORE

That is logic. The more bad actions your father committed, the more your kind heart strives to counteract them by doing good.

MRS. BROWN

Something like that, perhaps, Monsieur. Now, I thought that in your situation as a great dressmaker

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

you might be able to help me to find the thread—
what do you call it?—the thread—

FENIMORE

The thread of Ariadne. Unfortunately, I have not the spool! But I know a charitable lady who is very successful in disentangling mysteries—the Marquise de Létoirières—for whom the most complicated family-trees have no secrets. In consideration of a reasonable offer, I feel sure she will be able to discover your young woman, no matter under what obscure roof she may be hidden.

MRS. BROWN

Oh, I would willingly give a thousand pounds sterling if I could only speak to her this moment!

AGATHA (*enters*)

Monsieur, Madame la Marquise with Monsieur de Montlouis.

FENIMORE

My magician? You see, he has divined your wish, and he will grant it for nothing.

MRS. BROWN (*rises*)

Oh, supernatural!

FENIMORE (*to AGATHA*)

Well, why do you not show them in?

AGATHA

Well—you see—Monsieur—I—I thought you were particularly engaged with Madame!

A TURN OF LUCK

MRS. BROWN

What! Particularly engaged with me, Monsieur Fenimore? Oh, shocking!

FENIMORE

Don't be alarmed, Madame! I am always discreet!

AGATHA (*speaks off stage*)

You may enter, Madame la Marquise. (*Exit*)

SCENE XIII

THE MARQUISE (*enters with M. DE MONTLOUIS*)

You see that Monsieur Fenimore is always at home for me. (*To M. DE MONTLOUIS, dropping his arm*) I shall not take my eye off you! (*Aside*) That is the rich American lady, is it not?

FENIMORE (*aside*)

What! Are you after her already?

THE MARQUISE

Certainly! For my nephew. Present us!

FENIMORE

Madame la Marquise, Mrs. Brown of New York.

THE MARQUISE

Good morning, Madame.

MRS. BROWN

Good morning. May I shake hands with Madame la Marquise?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE MARQUISE

With pleasure. (*They shake hands*)

MRS. BROWN (*aside*)

Very sympathetic!

THE MARQUISE (*to M. de Montlouis*)

She is splendid! She looks exactly as I looked when I was thirty. (*Aside to Fenimore*) Stand a little farther away! (*Aloud*) My nephew, the Comte de Montlouis.

MRS. BROWN

He is a very good magician, isn't he?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

It is true, Madame, that I can read the lines of the hand—in an amateur way.

MRS. BROWN

Well, I will give you my hand.

THE MARQUISE (*to Fenimore*)

Bravo! All is going well!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

I shall be delighted, Madame, but—what shall I do with it?

MRS. BROWN

Why, perhaps you can tell me from that where I must go to find the person of whom I am in search.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

That, I fear, is beyond my power, and nothing less than a miracle—

A TURN OF LUCK

(*The door opens, and MRS. BROWN sees LOUISE, who enters*)

MRS. BROWN

Oh, supernatural!

SCENE XIV

FENIMORE

Hasten, Mademoiselle! We are waiting for you.

LOUISE (*greatly agitated*)

It is useless, Monsieur. I have come to take leave of you at once.

FENIMORE

You? Impossible!

LOUISE

Do not insist upon my remaining, I beg of you! I will not stay in a house where I have just been insulted in the grossest and most unexpected manner.

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Insulted by whom?

FENIMORE

It must have been by your friend, Mademoiselle Métella.

LOUISE (*to FENIMORE*)

Yes, Monsieur, by that—person, who dared to say to my face, before every one, that I was following in *her* footsteps!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

In *her* footsteps—you?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

LOUISE (*to FENIMORE*)

Yes—I! And that I was—

FENIMORE

Well—that you were—

LOUISE

The mistress of Monsieur de Montlouis!

ALL

Oh! Shameful!

LOUISE

Yes, it is infamous, is it not? So, when to a succession of bitter humiliations such an outrage as this is added, and when one has neither father nor brother to act as avengers, the only thing one can do, Monsieur (*to FENIMORE*) is to go, proudly, sustained by a clear conscience and perfect innocence! (*About to go*)

M. DE MONTLOUIS (*follows her*)

You must not go thus, Mademoiselle!

THE MARQUISE (*aside*)

Now he is about to commit some folly!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

I feel that I am the only person responsible for this unfortunate affair. I was attracted by the mysterious charm that surrounds you, Mademoiselle, and, drawn by a sympathy all the more vivid since it was awakened by the observation of a striking contrast between yourself and another, I was not sufficiently master of my feelings to hide them. I, then, am the cause of the unqualified outrage. You say you have neither

A TURN OF LUCK

father nor brother to defend you. So much the better! The reparation which I aspire to offer you will be the more striking. Will you do me the honor to leave this place under my escort, as the *fiancée* of Gaston de Montlouis?

MRS. BROWN (*aside*)

Oh, how very French!

LOUISE

Your generous heart misleads you, Monsieur. A man does not marry an orphan, without fortune—

THE MARQUISE

And without birth—certainly not; it would be the height of folly.

MRS. BROWN (*approaches the MARQUISE*)

Without birth, did you say? What! Mademoiselle de la Roche-Landry?

THE MARQUISE

De la Roche-Landry? Why, that is one of the oldest names in France!

LOUISE

It is mine, Madame. Miss Simson knows better than any one the reason why she that bears it is to-day penniless.

MRS. BROWN

Penniless? What, when I have come all the way to France for the purpose of restoring to her her fortune?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE MARQUISE

Her fortune?

MRS. BROWN

Certainly. Five hundred thousand dollars on the liquidation of Simson and Company. Here is the cheque, Louise. Oh, take it, my dear! It is a debt of honor.

THE MARQUISE

Two and a half million francs in that little scrap of paper!

MRS. BROWN

Payable at the house of Rothschild Brothers. Do you know them, Madame?

THE MARQUISE

Do I know them? I pass a good part of my time in running after them!

M. DE MONTLOUIS

Now that the orphan has become an heiress, will she still refuse her hand to the magician?

(MRS. BROWN *makes LOUISE pass before her, and leads her to M. DE MONTLOUIS*)

LOUISE (*extends her palm*)

Will you finish reading my fortune now, Monsieur?

M. DE MONTLOUIS

How this little hand trembles! Do you love me, then?

THE MARQUISE

It was fate! Birds of a feather flock together!

A TURN OF LUCK

LOUISE (*on DE MONTLOUIS's arm*)

Farewell, then, Monsieur Fenimore. We part without ill feeling, do we not?

FENIMORE

Of course, it must be so—although this means my ruin.

MRS. BROWN

All the better; you, too, can have a grand failure, and rebound afresh—like a lawn-tennis ball!

FENIMORE

It would be useless. I have not strength enough.
(Enter BENOIT) Is that you, Benoit? Sit down and write—

BENOIT

Sit down again?

FENIMORE

Yes, one final word, the swan-song of tradesmen—

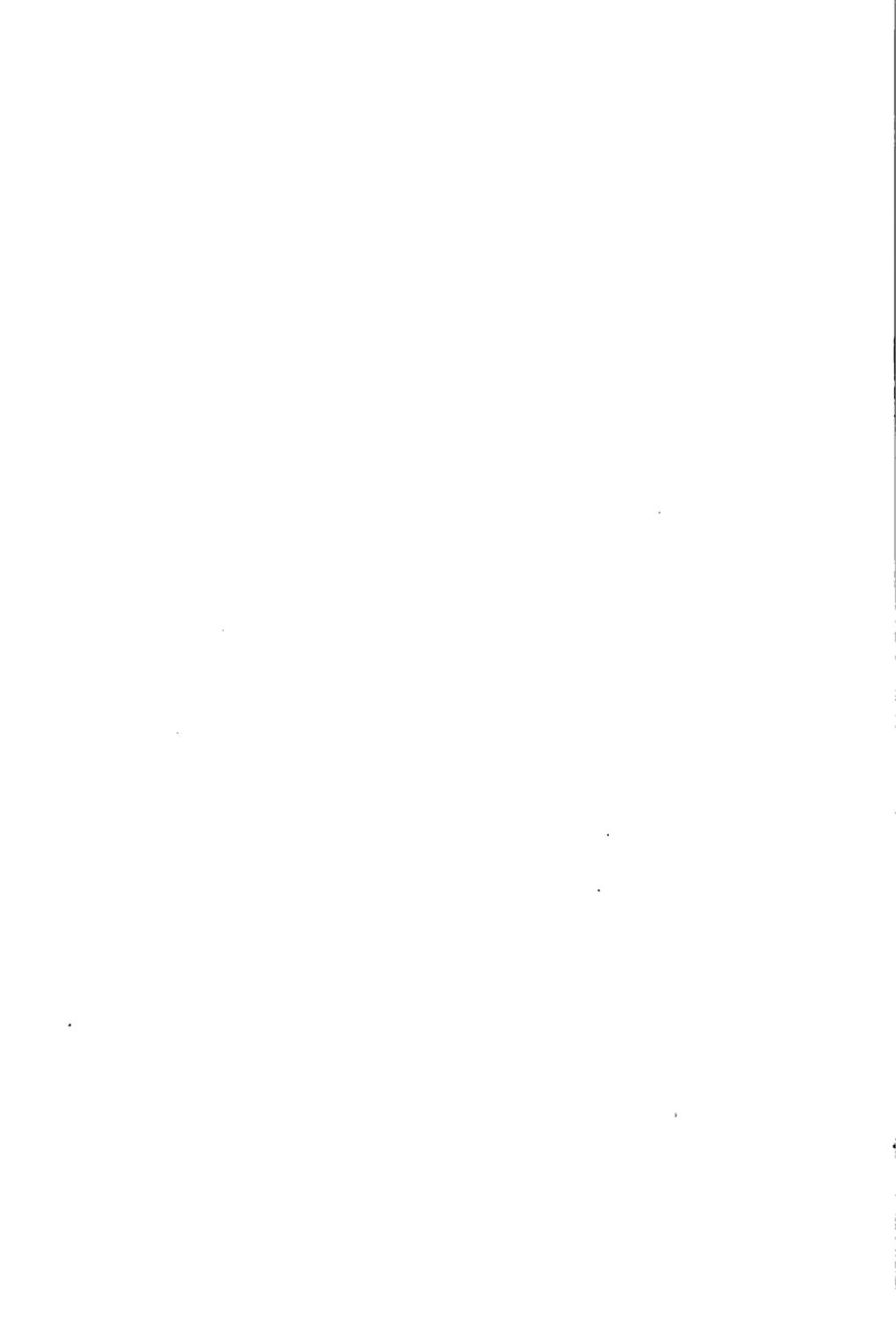
MRS. BROWN

Liquidation!

BENOIT (*writes*)

Liquidation! There it is!

CURTAIN



THE SCAR

A Comedy in One Act

BY

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

TRANSLATED BY

D. KNOWLTON RANOUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE COMTE DE THOMERY.

THE BARONESS DE VALVINS.

THE PRINCESS MARIESKA.

Scene: Paris.

Time: The Present.

THE SCAR

(SCENE: A small but elegant drawing-room. At the back is a fireplace. Sofa L. of fireplace. At R. I E. is a cosy nook backed by a handsome screen, with an armchair and a round table gracefully disposed. On a small, low table, near the armchair, is a tea-service. On the larger table is a set of electric wires and ivory buttons. On a table standing L. I E. is a movable telephone. Doors R. and L. at back. A doorway R. I E. with portière before it. At curtain the BARONESS and the PRINCESS are discovered seated.)

SCENE I

THE BARONESS

Yesterday, then, was the second anniversary of his death?

THE PRINCESS

Yes.

THE BARONESS

And you have had the courage to wear mourning for him two years—longer than one usually wears it for a quite irreproachable husband!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE PRINCESS

I have worn it chiefly to honor his name, which is still mine.

THE BARONESS

That is all very well, but if a man had beaten me—

THE PRINCESS

Ah! pardon me—that happened only once.

THE BARONESS

Once was too much, when you did not deserve it. And the idea that you were compelled to marry that brute—

THE PRINCESS

You know very well that had I been free to choose—

THE BARONESS

You would have married Monsieur de Thomery?

THE PRINCESS

Well, I own that I found him charming.

THE BARONESS

He is charming yet!

THE PRINCESS

Oh, I am aware of that! Unfortunately, his wooing never was serious. Besides, they say he is a man of many frivolous fancies, and I fear he would make short work of my fortune—he would soon eat up my worldly goods.

THE BARONESS

Well, at any rate, he couldn't drink them!

THE SCAR

THE PRINCESS

How shall I explain matters to you? The distinguished attentions of the Prince Marieska flattered my mother's maternal pride. His title alone, at ceremonious dinners, would guarantee to me an important place at the table; and you know—you have been an ambassadress—the prominence given in the social world to the question of precedence.

THE BARONESS

I should think so! It is important enough to raise a battle between mountains!

THE PRINCESS

Moreover, the Prince was rich. He belonged to one of the first families of Warsaw. Nothing in his appearance indicated his intemperate habits, and no one in my family could have suspected—

THE BARONESS

That when your Auguste was drunk, all Poland was drunk! And at what period did his cruelty toward you take place?

THE PRINCESS

Some time after your departure for the Orient, following a scene of jealousy.

THE BARONESS

Jealousy of whom?

THE PRINCESS (*rises*)

Of Monsieur de Thomery.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE BARONESS (*rises*)

What, even then?

THE PRINCESS

Yes. My husband, who persisted in regarding Monsieur de Thomery as an old rival, refused, when his name was put up for admission to the club, to allow Monsieur de Thomery to present him, although that gentleman was the vice-president of the club. This was allowed to become so well known that if one man did cherish against the other an unjust bitterness—

THE BARONESS

The other man regarded the first as being very ill-bred, and they hated each other cordially. Every one knows that. Continue!

THE PRINCESS

So, at the end of a three-months' honeymoon—

THE BARONESS

Mixed with absinthe?

THE PRINCESS

No, not too much so! At the end of three months, I say, we made our entrance into society at the costume ball of Madame Noirval; I in powder, he in a red coat. It had been understood before we went that I was not to dance in the cotillon, but my husband, having found at supper some foreigners whom he knew, proposed himself that I should sit alone in the ballroom while he returned to the table to talk

THE SCAR

with his friends. Every one had been provided with a partner, and I was in danger of being alone in a corner when Monsieur de Thomery, seeing my predicament, hastened to me with two chairs, and constituted himself my cavalier.

THE BARONESS

Charming fellow!—he cherished no resentment then, at any rate!

THE PRINCESS

Listen to what followed! They had just begun the third figure—

THE BARONESS

When your husband appeared in the doorway facing you!

THE PRINCESS

Pale, and with set teeth!

THE BARONESS

Like the Barber of Seville:

“J'ai vu l'homme du Nord à la lèvre farouche
Jusqu' au sang nous meurtrir la chair.”

THE PRINCESS

No, no! Not before every one!

THE BARONESS

I hope not! I only said that for the sake of the quotation. And then?

THE PRINCESS

He crossed the salon coldly, disarranging chairs

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

as he went, and, without a single word of apology to my cavalier, ordered me imperiously to follow him. Never in my life shall I forget the look those two men exchanged!

THE BARONESS

Br-r-r! It gives one a chill to think of it! But, as it was necessary at any cost to avoid a scene, you obediently entered the carriage, and there——

THE PRINCESS

Not a word! Only a frightful calm!

THE BARONESS

Probably the liquor he had taken was fermenting in his brain.

THE PRINCESS

Yes. I expected a scene, of course—acrimonious, probably, though within the bounds of decency. But when we had arrived in this very room, the Prince, paler and fiercer than before, seized me roughly by the arm in a vise-like grip, and, glaring straight into my eyes, said: "I warn you that I never shall allow myself to be made ridiculous; see that you heed my warning!" At the same moment, he pushed me violently toward this sofa; my head struck with great force against the corner of the mantelpiece, and I was unconscious three hours.

THE BARONESS

Brute of a Cossack!

THE PRINCESS (*raises curl on right temple*)
Look at the scar!

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS (*examines scar*)

A dent deep enough to lay a finger in!—what a fiend! Fortunately, it can not be seen under your curls. Well, what happened when you recovered your senses?

THE PRINCESS

I found kneeling beside me a man frantic with shame and despair; in such a condition, in fact, as almost to arouse my sympathy.

THE BARONESS

No, no! You were not so weak as that?

THE PRINCESS

Calm yourself, my dear; I am as proud as you. After a long discussion of the matter, he accepted all my conditions: a complete separation, and his immediate departure on a long voyage. As to what followed, no one knows it better than yourself.

THE BARONESS

Yes, I know. The Prince entered the service in Turkey, and two months later, like a Pole of the old school, he got himself spectacularly killed by a Russian bullet at the defence of Plevna.

THE PRINCESS

Leaving me his whole fortune.

THE BARONESS

A second extenuating circumstance!

THE PRINCESS

You pardon him, then?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE BARONESS

Requiescat in pace!

THE PRINCESS (*takes the BARONESS's hand*)
Amen! (*Sits*)

THE BARONESS (*approaches the PRINCESS*)
And has Monsieur de Thomery never known the
whole truth about this affair?

THE PRINCESS

He knows no more about it than any one else. During my first year of widowhood he gave no sign of life; but since then he has called regularly twice a week, on my reception days, but never has made the slightest allusion to that scene at the ball.

THE BARONESS

But he does pay court to you?

THE PRINCESS

Yes—and no!

THE BARONESS

And you—well, you are simply crazy over him!

THE PRINCESS

What an idea!

THE BARONESS

Why, it is almost of a mathematical certainty. Unless a woman loves the man that ill-treats her, she always loves the man on whose account she is ill-treated!

THE PRINCESS

Well, suppose I do love him? I can not throw my hand at his head!

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

No, not before he has deposited his heart at your feet! That is evident.

THE PRINCESS (*rises*)

So you see there is an abyss between us.

THE BARONESS

Perhaps. 'But one might throw a bridge across it.

THE PRINCESS

Who?

THE BARONESS

I, for instance. I have been a long time in the diplomatic service, and have seen eleven ministers of foreign affairs lose their heads under my administration! You see, therefore, that you would be perfectly safe in giving me *carte blanche*. To begin: to-day is your reception day, is it not?

THE PRINCESS

Yes; I receive Mondays and Fridays.

THE BARONESS

And, of course, the man of your dreams will be sure to call.

THE PRINCESS

He—and many others.

THE BARONESS

The latter is just what we must prevent. (*Crosses behind the PRINCESS, goes to the round table and presses one of the ivory buttons attached to the wires*) This calls the butler, I think.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE PRINCESS

Now, Marie, no foolish tricks!

THE BARONESS

Do you wish to know exactly what we must do in order to bring about the desired climax?

THE PRINCESS

Yes, certainly. (*Butler appears at door L.*)

THE BARONESS

Then let me manage this alone! (*To the butler*) Say to every one that calls to-day, except Monsieur le Comte de Thomery, that the Princess is ill and can receive no one. (*Exit Butler*)

THE PRINCESS

That is absurd. You will involve me in some unpleasantness.

THE BARONESS

All the better! If some offended lady wishes to challenge you, and sends you her seconds, you can tell them that you are now expecting only those who are to be present at the wedding. This evening you must dine with us, and afterward we will take you to the theatre with Monsieur de Thomery. That is the first act of the play: you will be observed together; to-morrow the news of your approaching marriage will be heard by every one, and the day after, it will be useless to deny it. (*Crosses in front of the PRINCESS, goes to the telephone, and presses a button*)

THE PRINCESS

What are you about to do now?

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

To telephone to my husband to secure a box at the theatre. (*Telephone bell rings*) Give me the Hôtel Continental, apartment thirty-three, the Baron de Valvins.

THE PRINCESS

Have you still any faith in that machine? The persons to whom one wishes to speak never answer. I will wager whatever you like that your husband is not there.

THE BARONESS (*takes up receiver*)

My husband? I should like to see him anywhere else! (*Speaks into telephone*) Hello! Hello! Who is that? Is that you, Maurice? Good! Will you secure immediately a box at the Variétés, please? (*Turns toward the PRINCESS*) You see that my husband was just where he should be! (*Speaks into telephone*) Hello? "What for," did you say? Why, what do you suppose? You don't expect me to tell you now, do you? (*Stamps her foot*) Oh, dear! how stupid!

THE PRINCESS

It is rather useless to make gestures, my dear—the telephone can not transmit them, you know!

THE BARONESS (*turns half around*)

Yes, it is an awkward lack sometimes. (*Speaks into telephone*) Hello! Hello! What? Oh! . . . Good! . . . I did not understand you. Very well! Good-by! (*Hangs up receiver*) He is going at once to secure the box himself.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE PRINCESS

That is the first time that my telephone ever has been of the slightest use.

THE BARONESS

Happy omen! (*Bell rings*) A visitor! Behold the obstinate one! Quick! Hide yourself!

THE PRINCESS

Why should I hide myself?

THE BARONESS

It is very natural, since you are ill.

THE PRINCESS

For others, but not for him.

THE BARONESS

Are your batteries all in order, then?

THE PRINCESS

What batteries?

THE BARONESS

Your batteries of attack. Those that must force the enemy to unmask himself. You see that you are no more skilful in tactics than in strategy, and that without my assistance you never would accomplish anything. (*Takes off her hat and points at door R. I E.*) Go in there and listen. If I say too much, you must feel free to come out and contradict me. If I do not, then do not come back until I have gone out.

THE PRINCESS

Tell me, at least, why you have taken off your hat.

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

Oh, that is only a ruse. I tell you, my powers of diplomacy would rout Bismarck himself! Quick! He is coming!

THE PRINCESS

Who? Bismarck?

THE BARONESS

No, no! His antipodes—the man you love! Away with you! (*Pushes the PRINCESS through doorway R. I E., and draws portiere after her*)

A FOOTMAN (*at door L., at back*)

Monsieur le Comte de Thomery!

THE BARONESS

High time! (*Sits in an armchair in front of screen, takes a book and affects to read. Enter the COMTE DE THOMERY. Exit footman*)

SCENE II

DE THOMERY (*mistakes the BARONESS for the PRINCESS*)

Alone! (*Approaches*) I am fortunate, Princess, in being to-day the first arrival.

THE BARONESS (*extends her hand*)

I am delighted to see you, my dear Count!

DE THOMERY (*surprised*)

What! Madame de Valvins! Well!

THE BARONESS

Your extreme surprise is not flattering.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

I beg your pardon! You see, I thought you were still at the embassy in Constantinople.

THE BARONESS

And therefore a fixture, eh? Well, not quite!

DE THOMERY

I understand. As the ladies wear the trousers in that country, and the men wear petticoats, you managed things to suit yourself!

THE BARONESS

Since you put it that way—yes!

DE THOMERY

And since you had no settled home to occupy when you arrived, the Princess has offered to share with you her house, of which you have so gracefully done the honors for me.

THE BARONESS

You are a sorcerer! Won't you sit down? Will you have some tea?

DE THOMERY

Made by your fair hands—I will! (*Sits*)

THE BARONESS (*laughs*)

It is not hard to see that you have acted in *The Caprice*.

DE THOMERY

Very often—in my journeys about the provinces. Always in châteaux, you understand. Thank you, that is enough sugar. Now, pour!

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

Pour! You must fancy yourself at a *café chantant*.

DE THOMERY

At that of the Ambassadressess, eh?

THE BARONESS

Very neat! You still exercise your wit, I see.

DE THOMERY

Sometimes—in a pleasant *tête-à-tête*.

THE BARONESS

If I am to believe what I hear of you, you never have lacked such occasions to display it.

DE THOMERY

You are mistaken. Nothing is more difficult than to talk to a woman—alone, I mean; certain women, you understand. In society, surrounded by the multitude, there is some opportunity; but in their homes, on their reception-days, with tiresome or stupid people sitting about, or coming and going—never!

THE BARONESS

Pleasant way you have of classifying your friends!

DE THOMERY

They would say the same of me, no doubt.

THE BARONESS

But you will not deny, I suppose, that you have had some spicy adventures, at least.

DE THOMERY (*rises, comes down c.*)

Never!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE BARONESS

Tartufe!

DE THOMERY

Unless you would thus designate those charming little visits that my fair friends occasionally make me in the early morning, on their way to church!

THE BARONESS (*severely*)

Monsieur de Thomery!

DE THOMERY

Why, surely, there is no harm in that—since they go to do penance immediately after!

THE BARONESS

Silence, sceptic!

DE THOMERY

You still labor under a delusion. I assure you that no one respects more than I the highest moral quality of really good women.

THE BARONESS

The only ones who have resisted you!

DE THOMERY

They have not been called upon to do so. I never have dared to approach them.

THE BARONESS

Mention one to me, for instance.

DE THOMERY

Two, if you like: yourself and the Princess Mari-
eska.

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

Without a moment's hesitation, too! Good! But now, tell me something. Since you cherish so good an opinion of most women, how does it happen that you never have married?

DE THOMERY

You ask me that? It is a long story, and one that would seem very tame to a lady who has just arrived from the land of the *Arabian Nights*.

THE BARONESS

Tell it to me all the same. It will make a pleasant variation.

DE THOMERY

Do you really mean it? (*Sits*) Well, once upon a time—

THE BARONESS

A very long time?

DE THOMERY

No, only three years. Once upon a time there was a hardened old bachelor who had squandered his own fortune, and an elderly aunt, who did not appear to be at all in haste to leave him hers.

THE BARONESS

How large was her fortune?

DE THOMERY

Four or five million francs—not more.

THE BARONESS

Well, that was a pretty little sum.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

Very pretty if one is not compelled to wait too long for it! Now, the good lady seemed to have determined not to take her departure to a better world until she had satisfactorily settled in this world the aforesaid hardened bachelor. She had some ideas that belonged to the Middle Ages, especially in the management of her younger relatives' affairs. So she fixed her choice upon a young girl of aristocratic birth—

THE BARONESS

Her name was—

DE THOMERY

Impossible to mention that!

THE BARONESS

Very well! I will not insist.

DE THOMERY

That is wise, because I should not tell you. She chose a young girl, I say, around whom several gay cavaliers were already disporting themselves as pretenders to her hand.

THE BARONESS

A sort of sentimental steeplechase! This begins to be exciting!

DE THOMERY

Not yet, but there are some exciting details which I will mention later. Not wishing deliberately to thwart the designs of his aunt, who might disinherit him, the bachelor invented all sorts of pretexts in order to put off the fatal interview, leaving a free field

THE SCAR

to his rivals and going his own way, when one fine evening, at a charity bazaar, Fate brought about between the young lady and the refractory bachelor the most piquant and unexpected meeting.

THE BARONESS

And was she delicious?

DE THOMERY

Beyond his wildest dreams!

THE BARONESS

So he joined in the steeplechase, eh?

DE THOMERY

He did, and he used spurs, whip, and everything that a jockey uses on a race-track in order to make up lost distance while the rider in front of him is doing his utmost. But in vain! And he, who, had he started with the others, might have had a fair chance to win the race, was finally outstripped by a foreigner, without being able to find the slightest excuse for challenging the victor. The poor old aunt died of grief in the arms of the vanquished one!

THE BARONESS (*rises*)

I pity her sincerely! And the other—the delicious young girl—what has she become?

DE THOMERY (*having risen with the BARONESS*)

A delicious young widow!

THE BARONESS

Well, what is there to prevent you from beginning the race all over again?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

The fact that more than a mere obstacle separates us now—it is an abyss!

THE BARONESS

But—one might throw a bridge across it.

DE THOMERY

Impossible, Madame! It would cost too much.

THE BARONESS

How much?

DE THOMERY

Two or three millions! I do not know the exact sum the fair widow inherited from her late husband, but I do know that, in order to fill up the yawning chasm between us, nothing less than an equal amount would satisfy me.

THE BARONESS

It seems to me that you require a very large amount to fill that chasm!

DE THOMERY

That is possible; but there are spoils of victory that no commander would think of dividing.* Others, in my place, might regard such conquest as legitimate warfare, but I do not.

THE BARONESS

In short, you are not like other men!

DE THOMERY

Ah, pardon me! I assure you that, so far as phys-

* A reference to the *spolia opima* of Roman generals.

THE SCAR

ical powers go, I—well, mine have made me commit many follies in my time!

THE BARONESS

Poor Monsieur de Thomery!

DE THOMERY

Poor? No, indeed, Madame!

THE BARONESS

Your aunt did not disinherit you, then?

DE THOMERY

Heavens! No! That would have been the last straw!

THE BARONESS

So that you are now really a very good match?

DE THOMERY

Magnificent, Madame! But I have sworn never to go into training again, not even for a flat race.

THE BARONESS (*aside*)

We shall see about that! (*Telephone bell rings*)

DE THOMERY

That must be the Princess ringing.

THE BARONESS

No, it is my husband, who wishes to speak to me.

DE THOMERY

Oh, indeed!

THE BARONESS (*goes to telephone*)

Will you permit me?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

Certainly, Madame! Don't mind me! (*While the Baroness puts the receiver to her ear and listens, De Thomery examines the electric wires and ivory buttons on the large round table*) Here is the telegraph, there is the telephone! This apartment is as well fitted up as the office of a cabinet minister.

THE BARONESS (*speaks in telephone*)

Is this the Hôtel Continental? . . . Yes! . . . Give me that connection again, please.

DE THOMERY (*examines small printed signs over the wires at the places where they enter the wall*)

Kitchen! Reception-room! Two for the hall-porter! Why two for the hall-porter, I wonder? (*Reads*) "I am at home to any one." To all the bores, that means!

THE BARONESS

Hello! Hello, Maurice! What? no more boxes to be had for the Variétés? Have you tried the agencies?

DE THOMERY (*reads another sign*)

"Do not let any one come up." Ah, don't let any one spoil a tête-à-tête, that means!

THE BARONESS (*at telephone*)

Certainly, the agencies! . . . Oh, you never thought of that, eh? That is not surprising. You never do think of things.

DE THOMERY

So, here is another little domestic secret divulged by electricity.

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS (*at telephone*)

No, never mind! Don't bother any more about it. I will go myself. (*Hangs up receiver and comes down stage*) What are you doing there, Monsieur? (*Takes up her hat*)

DE THOMERY

I? Nothing! I was simply studying modern inventions.

THE BARONESS (*puts on her hat before the mirror over the fireplace*)

We are going to the theatre with the Princess this evening. We will call you up by telephone at your club, before dinner, and tell you the number of our box.

DE THOMERY

I should prefer to receive a note, if you don't mind. Because that is the time when I play my regular game of beziique, and if I am disturbed to go to the telephone I invariably "cross the Rubicon" and lose the game.

THE BARONESS (*puts on her gloves*)

Very well. Now I must ask you to excuse me for running away.

DE THOMERY

I beg that you will act precisely as if you were in your own house.

THE BARONESS

Well, I think that I shall do so, since I am about to put you out.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

Put me out! And the Princess?

THE BARONESS

What Princess?

DE THOMERY

The Princess Marieska, who receives every Monday.

THE BARONESS

The Princess is not here now—I have bought her residence.

DE THOMERY (*astonished*)

Surely you jest! Since when?

THE BARONESS

Since this morning, in order to assist her in her settlement.

DE THOMERY

What settlement?

THE BARONESS

The settlement of her fortune, of which she wishes to be able to dispose at her pleasure, whenever she chooses.

DE THOMERY

With what object?

THE BARONESS

So that she may go far away from here, to seek—forgetfulness!

DE THOMERY

A 1 2 3 4 5

THE SCAR

THE BARONESS

No; with her mother, who has already found diversion for her daughter's melancholy in the person of a wealthy foreigner.

DE THOMERY (*emphatically*)

What, another?

THE BARONESS

Yes. This time it is a Dane of noble birth, but it is almost impossible to pronounce his name. Jeanne will tell it to you this morning when she says good-by to you.

DE THOMERY

Come, now, Baroness, don't keep me in a torture of curiosity.

THE BARONESS

Would you prefer to know all immediately? Well, remain here. I will go to the Princess and interrupt her in her superintendence of packing up.

DE THOMERY

Oh, yes, do! Tell her it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to her.

THE BARONESS (*aside*)

Aha! (*Aloud*) Well, in any case, we shall see you this evening? (*Goes up stage toward door L.*)

DE THOMERY (*agitated*)

Oh, yes—this evening! (*The BARONESS opens the door and pretends to go, but leaves it half open and peeps out from behind it*)

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY (*believing himself alone*)

Whether all that she said is true or false, now or never is the time to speak! (*Goes to the telegraph instrument, looks at the signs on the wall and presses a button*) "Do not let any one come up," that says! Very good! That is done, at least.

THE BARONESS (*from behind door*)

Stupid! It was done long ago! (*disappears*)

SCENE III

THE PRINCESS (*enters R. i E.*)

Madame de Valvins has told me that you insist upon seeing me, my dear Count.

DE THOMERY

Tell me, Princess—is what she has been telling me true?

THE PRINCESS

Before I can answer that, I must know what she has been telling you.

DE THOMERY (*indicates sofa*)

Then will you permit me to lead you to this seat for a moment?

THE PRINCESS (*quickly*)

Oh, no! Not that seat! You may sit there, if you wish, but not I.

DE THOMERY

Do you fear that I should presume upon the *tête-à-tête*?

THE SCAR

THE PRINCESS

Certainly not—but—suppose some one should come in?

DE THOMERY

Never mind that! No one will come in

THE PRINCESS

What, no one—on my Monday?

DE THOMERY

Ah, then you admit that you are still in your own house?

THE PRINCESS

Well—yes—for several days, at least.

DE THOMERY (*sits on sofa*)

I breathe! (*Leans back, and strikes his head slightly against a corner of the mantelpiece*) Ah!

THE PRINCESS

Take care! That mantelpiece has a very sharp corner.

DE THOMERY

Well, a little bump on the head is soon cured.

THE PRINCESS (*sits on a chair near the sofa*)
Not always.

DE THOMERY

While a wound in the heart—

THE PRINCESS

A wound in the heart! I never knew you to indulge in sentiment on that point.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

DE THOMERY

I am not speaking of mine, Princess, but of yours; for in presence of the memories which this house must recall to you, it is evident that regret is the cause of your leaving it; and when you have left it—

THE PRINCESS

When I have left it?

DE THOMERY

Others, for various motives, never will pass it without regretting bitterly the absence of the exquisite woman who once dwelt within it.

THE PRINCESS

“Exquisite” is a mere compliment! Come, be frank, to how many others have you offered this pretty phrase?

DE THOMERY (*rises*)

To many—as a mere compliment! To one alone I offer it because it belongs to her without restriction. If I have used it to others, it was in a half laughing way, amused at their credulity; to you, I swear, I speak the word under the influence of the most sincere emotion and without the slightest shadow of jest.

THE PRINCESS (*rises*)

This is a sort of declaration.

DE THOMERY

Categorical!

THE PRINCESS (*comes down L.*)

Categorical, but tardy.

THE SCAR

DE THOMERY

"Tardy" is a mere pleasantry. Come, be frank in your turn. When, until to-day, has there been a time within the past year that I could speak freely to you? Tell me whether another Célimène exists whose dwelling is so besieged with aspirants to her hand—above all, foreign aspirants!

THE PRINCESS

It is not my fault if they express more admiration for me than for others. It is not my fault if one among them—

DE THOMERY

Well, finish your sentence, I beg. If one of them, encouraged by Madame your mother, is about to marry you.

THE PRINCESS

What! Has Madame de Valvines had the indiscretion to tell you—

DE THOMERY (*quickly*)

Then it is true?

THE PRINCESS

Well—yes, it is true, but for heaven's sake calm yourself—suppose any one should come in suddenly!

DE THOMERY

Do not be uneasy; I have taken precautions about that. (*The PRINCESS sits*) So, it appears that to-day, as happened three years ago, not a single native Frenchman, of good family, can be found on these new wooden pavements who stands high enough in your esteem to be judged worthy of you! For a foreign prince, smiles

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

and sweet words; for a French gentleman, mistrust and discredit. Let the former rush off and break his head in some crazy adventure in an unheard-of region—that surprises no one—it is admirable—he is a hero! But let the latter risk his life a dozen times in defending his country from the invading enemy—no one cares about that; he is an old story, to whom one would not even grant the kindness of a belief in his sudden conversion, such as occurred to Saint Paul on his way to Damascus. However—

THE PRINCESS

/ Some angelic vision has appeared to you, then?

DE THOMERY

No one is better aware of that than you! Unfortunately, it was too late; you were betrothed to another, to a foreign prince, an exotic—

THE PRINCESS

You know very well that one is not always free to choose.

DE THOMERY

Yes, but the title of princess sounds so well that it was useless for my ancestors to accompany Saint Louis in the crusades, since the good King could not foresee that because I should lack a coronet Madame your mother would one day refuse to give me the hand of her daughter.

THE PRINCESS

Poor Monsieur de Thomery!

THE SCAR

DE THOMERY

At that time, yes—poor, indeed! But since then that celestial vision has transformed my life, and although the very thought of seeing you belong to another was agony to me, I did not the less seek, even during his lifetime, every possible occasion to meet you. That is the reason why I appeared so often in society, especially whenever there was dancing.

THE PRINCESS

I had, indeed, noticed that——

DE THOMERY

Women never have any difficulty in perceiving such signs!

THE PRINCESS

I was not the only one. *He* also perceived it.

DE THOMERY

Ah! He had his eyes open, then?

THE PRINCESS

He knew quite well that I should not have married him, had I not been compelled to do so. I have already intimated this to you.

DE THOMERY

Then he did me the honor to be jealous of me?

THE PRINCESS

More than you ever would believe.

DE THOMERY

So that the memories which this house recalls to you——

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE PRINCESS

Are not exactly rose-colored, I assure you!

DE THOMERY

Ah! So much the better!

THE PRINCESS

You are not generous, since that fact is largely your fault.

DE THOMERY

My fault? In what way?

THE PRINCESS

Your fault, certainly. And if my husband did not imagine that you sought to compromise me—

DE THOMERY (*raises his voice*)

Compromise you! I? Well, really, that is too much!

THE PRINCESS

Hush! Don't speak so loud.

DE THOMERY

Don't be uneasy—no one will come. I seek to compromise you! I, to whom the reputation of a pure woman is a thing so holy and sacred that I endured for your sake the height of impertinence and the most outrageous of suspicions.

THE PRINCESS

Ah, yes! I remember!

DE THOMERY

Compromise *you*, before whom, in the ballroom, after a public insult, I restrained my hand, at the

THE SCAR

thought of the scandal that would be reflected, should I strike the brazen face of that execrable man, upon the pure brow of the only girl who had ever touched my heart.

THE PRINCESS (*tries to assume a lightness of tone; goes up stage and leans her elbow on the right-hand corner of the mantelpiece*)

True! You were very heroic!

DE THOMERY (*goes up stage toward the sofa l. of fireplace*)

I feel more convinced of that now than I ever have felt before.

THE PRINCESS

Well, and how about myself?

DE THOMERY

You? You had only to yield a passive obedience, and that is what you did. (*Sits on sofa*)

THE PRINCESS (*still leans on mantelpiece*)

Indeed! So—have you never asked yourself whether the imprudence I committed, in accepting at that ball the attentions of a former rival who my husband well knew was not indifferent to me, had involved me in unpleasant consequences? Have you never reflected upon the possibility that a man so jealous and hot-headed as the Prince might have subjected me, in his uncontrolled anger, to bitter reproaches, even to violence? That he might even, in a moment of fury or of intoxication, have treated the woman who stands

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

before you as rough men sometimes treat the lowest of women on coming out of a tavern?

DE THOMERY

Treat you like the lowest of women—you! (*Rises suddenly, and strikes his head violently against the corner of the mantelpiece*) Ah!

THE PRINCESS (*comes down c.*)

You see that I was right when I told you that that corner was dangerous.

DE THOMERY (*comes down c.*)

And you were kind enough not to laugh at me.

THE PRINCESS

Laugh at that? Heaven forbid! I myself carry too deep a scar from it. And since we are speaking of that fatal evening—look! (*Lifts the curls on her forehead*)

DE THOMERY

Saints in heaven! He dared to strike you, the wretch!

THE PRINCESS

That scar was the final episode of the ball in question, Monsieur de Thomery. You see now that I, too, have suffered—for you!

DE THOMERY (*clasps his hands*)

For me! Ah, pardon me, sweet and adorable woman that you are! For me, who thought that perhaps you loved that man! For me, jealous as I was even of his memory while you wore mourning for him all

THE SCAR

last year! How is it possible to make you forget that I was the involuntary cause of that abominable crime?

THE PRINCESS

By never speaking again of him who tried to efface the trace of it at the price of his life.

DE THOMERY

And, unfortunately for me, at the price of his fortune!

THE PRINCESS

Pardon me! Did you not understand what Madame de Valvins told you?

DE THOMERY

Oh, you mean what she said about a settlement of your affairs?

THE PRINCESS

Yes. That is to say, the settlement of the Prince's fortune. To-day, which marks the expiration of my period of mourning, I have resolved to dispose of it for the benefit of the poor.

DE THOMERY (*smiles*)

At the instigation of the noble Dane who has proposed for your hand?

THE PRINCESS

Oh, no! It is probable that that gentleman will retire from the field, now that I expect to be comparatively poor.

DE THOMERY

Then, while you are still in the mood to do good works, carry your charity still farther!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

THE PRINCESS

In what way?

DE THOMERY

On high, in the abode of the blest, dwells that elderly aunt who left me her two hundred thousand francs' income only on the express condition that I should marry, some day, the woman she had chosen for me. So, you see, you ought not to wish to reduce me to the extreme of poverty!

THE PRINCESS

But—it would be necessary for me to sign myself "Comtesse de Thomery."

DE THOMERY

Worse yet!

THE PRINCESS

What, then?

DE THOMERY

You would have to resign yourself never to dine in society.

THE PRINCESS

And why, pray?

DE THOMERY

So that you would not find yourself compelled to take a less distinguished place at the table than that of the Princess Marieska.

THE PRINCESS

That would be hard, but I would try to accustom myself to it, not to humiliate you!

THE SCAR

DE THOMERY

And as for me—I promise never to get intoxicated, except in gazing upon your beauty! (*Takes both her hands and kisses them. Bell rings*)

THE PRINCESS (*crosses hastily R.*)

Take care! A visitor!

DE THOMERY

Again! But I have telegraphed not to allow any one to come up.

THE PRINCESS

What, Monsieur! Do you already allow yourself to forbid my door? This promises well for the future!

DE THOMERY

Pardon me, Princess! It was necessary, at all risks, to clear up the misunderstanding which has lasted three years, and so, in order that no one should disturb us while we groped in the labyrinth, I ventured—

(*Enter the BARONESS by door L. of C.*)

SCENE IV

THE PRINCESS (*points to telegraph wires*)

Evidently you found conveniently at hand the thread of Ariadne.

THE BARONESS (*comes down c.*)

Which has betrayed his secret, as they say on the stage. *A propos* of that, I shall not take you to the Variétés this evening, but to the Comédie-Française.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

The manager has just placed his own box at my disposal.

THE PRINCESS

He is always the most gallant of men. And what do they play to-night?

THE BARONESS

Le Médecin malgré Lui!

DE THOMERY

Oh, the deuce!

THE BARONESS

I understand! It is the story of a man who beat his wife.

DE THOMERY (*to the PRINCESS*)

And of a woman who defended herself bravely.

THE PRINCESS

Because she was not, as I am, sure of finding a better defender!

CURTAIN

MOUNT IDA

A Comedy in One Act

BY

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

TRANSLATED BY

D. KNOWLTON RANOUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE COMTESSE SUZANNE DE VALVINS

THE MARQUISE JULIA DE CHARTRETTES

VALENTINE DE PIROCAVA

The scene is laid in a country town a short distance from Paris, in the house of the MARQUISE DE CHARTRETTES.

Mount Ida

(SCENE: An elegant drawing-room in a country house, with a large window at the back, opening on a balcony. Two sets of folding-doors R. and L. of window. At L. 2 E. a mirror gives a reflection of a lighted hall without. At L. 1 E. stands a sofa. A bezique-table stands c. front, on a level with 1 E. At R. 1 E. is a piano, artistically draped, and placed in an oblique position. Lamps are lighted. Flower-stands here and there. Before the larger window is a table, on which stand two small candlesticks with wax candles; on the bezique-table is a large candelabra, with two branches, the candles in which have little rose-colored shades. At curtain SUZANNE is at the piano: JULIA and VALENTINE are seated at the bezique-table.)

SCENE I

SUZANNE (*plays piano and sings*)

Three goddesses on Mount Ida
Quarrelled beneath a tree.
“Which,” cried all the princesses,
“Is the fairest of us three?”

JULIA

The fairest—why, that is Valentine.

PHILLIPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE

I? Nonsense! The fairest is Julia; isn't that true,
Suzanne?

SUZANNE

Of course—Julia.

JULIA

It is only because you are my guests, here in my
own house, that you think you must say that, my
dears.

SUZANNE

Not at all! Even in Paris, the loveliest, the proudest,
the wisest, is always—Julia!

VALENTINE

Certainly—always Julia. Forty bezique!

JULIA

Heavens! Venus, Juno, and Minerva all in one!
That is too much for any one woman. I consent to remain
Minerva, but you must divide between yourselves
the other two *rôles*. I mark twenty.

SUZANNE

I will continue my allegory. (*Sings*)

A youth passed through the forest—
A youth so fair and free—

JULIA (*interrupts*)

That must be Monsieur de Montlouis, I think.

SUZANNE

Oh, indeed!

MOUNT ID'A

JULIA

In that case, I should say that "youth" was an exaggerated description!

VALENTINE

Yes, but "fair and free" is correct! I mark five hundred.

JULIA

Greedy! Go on with your song, Suzanne.

SUZANNE

Do you think it is easy to sing when you interrupt me every moment?

VALENTINE

But we must call our points, you know: two hundred and fifty!

JULIA

What, again?

SUZANNE

I will begin that once more. (*Plays and sings*)

A youth passed through the forest—

A youth so fair and free—

In his hand he held an apple,—

The picture you may see!

JULIA (*interrupts*)

Oh, yes, we can see that picture perfectly, the only difference between them and ourselves being that we are rather more discreetly dressed than were the goddesses in the fable.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE

And that our shepherd Paris wears a black coat,
and sits in the smoking-room out there, finishing his
cigar, while he ponders, in a cloud of smoke, upon the
judgment he will soon be called upon to pronounce.

SUZANNE

All the more reason why I should try to hypnotize
him from here with my siren song! (*Plays and sings*)

"Oh, pause, fair youth!" they cried,
Beneath the greenwood tree,
"And give thy rosy apple
To the fairest of us three!"
Alas! that damsels fair
Should fool a trusting lad!
That even a goddess, too,
Such curious manners had!

JULIA

Ha! ha! that's true enough.

SUZANNE (*whirls around on the piano-stool*)
What is true enough?

VALENTINE

Why, if you think that at the hunt, before the last
three beatings-up, during luncheon, no one noticed
how many advances you made toward Monsieur de
Montlouis, you are greatly mistaken.

SUZANNE (*jumps up and goes behind the two card-
players*)

How many advances?

MOUNT IDA

JULIA (*marks her points*)

One hundred and fifty!

SUZANNE (*laughs*)

Oh, come! Not so many as that!

VALENTINE (*arranges her cards*)

One hundred and fifty—perhaps that is rather a large estimate, but there were certainly enough to make every one notice you.

SUZANNE (*to VALENTINE*)

And how about yourself?

VALENTINE

About me?

SUZANNE

Yes, you. You, whom Julia was weak enough to place beside him at dinner. You showed sufficient coquetry, I think. In fact, it was almost revolting, my dear.

VALENTINE

Oh, well, I was only playing a fair game. I am a widow, you know!

SUZANNE (*comes down L.*)

While I am only a woman separated from her husband, you wish to imply? What then? It is now four years since my husband left me in order to live publicly with a circus-rider, and perhaps some persons think I ought, like a modern Penelope, continually to weave and to ravel out my web until my Ulysses of the Hip-

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

podrome shall condescend to return to me, rheumatic and decrepit! Good heavens, no! I have had enough of edifying the dowagers with the spectacle of my virtues. Monsieur de Montlouis pleases me; he is a very attractive man; and, since we have assigned to him the *rôle* of the shepherd Paris, I shall boldly enter the lists with you two in the rivalry of Mount Ida. (*To JULIA*) Mark your hundred points, child!

JULIA (*rises*)

It is hardly worth while; I have “crossed the Rubicon.”

VALENTINE (*shows her score*)

Five thousand points, my dear! Would you like your revenge?

JULIA

Thank you, but I am tired of always losing.

VALENTINE (*rises*)

Unlucky at cards, lucky in love! You will win the apple!

JULIA

So much the worse for Monsieur de Montlouis, for I shall be compelled to declare a forfeit to him. To nibble a little fruit in his company would be rather amusing; but to share a whole apple with him—never!

SUZANNE

You assume very seriously your *rôle* of Minerva.

VALENTINE

Or rather, you disown very severely our common ancestor, Mother Eve.

MOUNT IDA

JULIA

Well, that is because I am not at all like other women.

SUZANNE

Behold a phenomenon! Tell us the reason why you are not.

VALENTINE (*approaches JULIA*)

Oh, yes! Tell us!

JULIA

Before Suzanne, who has no action of her own to regret, it might not matter if I should tell it; but before you, Valentine, who were, perhaps, quite happy in your married life—

VALENTINE

To tell the truth, it lasted so short a time that I had no opportunity to accumulate many regrets! Besides, both of you know that Monsieur de Pirocava, my husband, was rich, but very ugly. He belonged to that bronzed race of South America near Terra del Fuego.

SUZANNE

Very like monkeys, in fact.

VALENTINE

Yes, very like monkeys, as you say, but of an exceedingly rare species, since mine left me twelve million francs to console me for his loss.

SUZANNE

Now you see that you may safely confide your secret to both of us, Julia.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

JULIA

Well, then, listen to it: I love—my husband!

VALENTINE

Impossible!

SUZANNE

Are you not ashamed to say that aloud?

JULIA

No one hears us! You must allow me to plead extenuating circumstances. (*All sit*) You remember my *début* in society. I made a sensible marriage, a little handicapped by the weight of two *dots*; otherwise, a match without any drawbacks or former *affaires* to settle, consequently without much interest to the contracting parties: Monsieur le Marquis de Chartrettes, a quiet country gentleman, and Mademoiselle Julia de Prérrolles, a young woman of aristocratic birth and artistic temperament. After this event occurred certain mutual concessions: Monsieur preferred to remain on his country estate, and Madame settled herself in Paris. At the end of a year, my name figured prominently in charitable works, and, like all women that respect themselves, I caught on the wing certain admirers who were permitted to flutter in my drawing-rooms.

VALENTINE

First, a distinguished composer!

SUZANNE

Of the most Wagnerian school!

JULIA

Of course!

MOUNT IDA

SUZANNE

Next, a renowned antiquarian.

VALENTINE

Followed by several men of letters.

JULIA

And two Academicians—one young, the other old—madly in love with me, and frantically jealous of each other!

SUZANNE

Who were they?

JULIA

Ah! I did not say! To be brief: we went in for modern music; they guided me in my choice of old paintings; everything worth while in literature that appeared was thoroughly sifted at my house by the young Academician—

SUZANNE

And thrown into the ditch by the old Academician! Every one knows that. Go on!

JULIA

One evening, when I was surrounded by my whole court, the door opened suddenly, and my husband, whom I had supposed to be on a hunting expedition, entered the drawing-room without the slightest warning.

VALENTINE

Like reckless waltzers in a ballroom.

SUZANNE

I suppose a coldness fell upon the assembly!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

JULIA

I should say so!

VALENTINE

And then?

JULIA

"Do not let me disturb you, gentlemen," said my husband, with perfect ease; "and if it is absolutely necessary to give you an example——" he added, approaching the piano——

SUZANNE

What for? To sing?

JULIA

The great air from *Myrtea*, my dear! With such a superb baritone as I never had dreamed he possessed, and a method that might give points to Faure himself. Ten minutes later, every one was talking about painting, and this wonderful man, my husband, whom every one supposed devoted to the breeding of pheasants, went directly to a Greuze head which I had bought the day before, and proved as clearly as daylight that some one had made me pay thirty thousand francs for a simple Trouillebert! By the time it was midnight he had laid out flat my two Academicians on the origin of Persian literature, of which they knew the history only by Montesquieu's *Letters*!

SUZANNE

Well, did they ever come again?

JULIA

I will tell you. They flew away, like two angry

MOUNT IDA

fighting-cocks, to continue the contest at a distance, at the feet of another Egeria, who has been feeding them for some time.

VALENTINE

And the result of this revelation?

JULIA

I came to the conclusion that the man I had married was superior to every other man I knew! (*Rises, and crosses R.*) That is the reason why I love my husband, and why I remain willingly with him in the country, even in the winter. Consequently, you will understand perfectly that I am not to be regarded seriously as a competitor, and that I shall not dispute the apple with you—or only very slightly—just enough not to throw discredit on my power to please. To prove this, I shall now go into the smoking-room, and I promise to send to you the shepherd Paris. (*Approaches folding-doors L. up stage, crossing in front of bezique-table*)

SUZANNE (*rises*)

You swear to do that?

JULIA

I swear it! (*Exit*)

SCENE II

VALENTINE (*stands near the piano*)

Tell me, Suzanne, do you really believe that Julia meant what she said, and that she has not gone into the smoking-room for the express purpose of getting the start of us?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

SUZANNE

What do you wish me to say to that? One never knows what a woman will do. (*Approaches the mirror near L. I E., which apparently gives view of hall outside*)

VALENTINE

That is very true. With men one knows better what to depend upon. The greater part of them have had military training, and when once they give their word—

SUZANNE (*gazes into the mirror*)

Sometimes they feel obliged to keep it! Ah! See! Julia is crossing the hall. . . . Now she goes straight to Monsieur de Montlouis; . . . now he rises most deferentially at her approach.

VALENTINE

That is simply a proof that he has been well brought up. I know many a man, younger than he, who would not trouble himself to do as much.

SUZANNE

Oh! Provoking!

VALENTINE (*approaches mirror*)

What is it?

SUZANNE

Monsieur de Chartrettes has just given him another cigar! Now we shall have to wait another half-hour. Isn't it heartbreaking? (*Crosses behind the bequique-table and goes to the piano*)

MOUNT IDA

VALENTINE

Suppose we go out there, too? We should know the sooner how matters progress.

SUZANNE (*detains her*)

What, all three together! No, no! Then he *would* think we were making advances—and I am not a widow as you are—unfortunately!

VALENTINE (*sits on sofa*)

Very well, then; we must wait.

SUZANNE

Yes, we must wait. (*Stands in front of the piano and touches the keys in accompaniment as she sings*)

Now 'twas the turn of the third
But she said never a word;
She had her price all the same—

VALENTINE (*interrupts*)

Do you know, Suzanne, I have an idea.

SUZANNE (*turns toward VALENTINE*)

What is it?

VALENTINE

What if we have been mistaken all this time, and if Monsieur de Montlouis has no intention of offering the apple to any one of us three?

SUZANNE (*shrugs her shoulders*)

What nonsense! Why, we are the only women in the house! (*Comes down c.*) Besides, do you not know the customs of these big guns from Paris? When they

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

take the trouble to visit the country for the shooting, it is only on condition that their host will not compel them to pass the evening with the ladies, but will take them to the station early enough to catch a train back to Paris in time for them to dine at the club. So that when by chance one of the big guns deliberately chooses to remain after the hunt, it must be because he is attracted by some other game than that which has been promised him.

VALENTINE (*rises and approaches SUZANNE*)
What the *menus* call "various game."

SUZANNE

Precisely! Consequently, for Monsieur de Mont-louis, the variety is represented by you, Julia, or myself.

VALENTINE (*very caressingly*)
Now, listen, my dear little Suzanne! Will you let me speak to you with perfect frankness? Well, then, I assure you that I—I am very tired of being a widow!

SUZANNE (*regards VALENTINE fixedly*)
Perhaps you think that I am not weary of my own prolonged loneliness!

VALENTINE

You—oh, yes, but your loneliness was a fatality. You are a victim.

SUZANNE

You might better say a martyr—a martyr to the customs of high life, considering that should I profit by the law of divorce—which is an anti-religious law, of course

MOUNT IDA

—I should be certain in advance that I never should be invited to the court balls.

VALENTINE

What court balls do you mean?

SUZANNE

Those of the next Restoration, which will probably be very straitlaced.

VALENTINE

All the more reason to remain as you are. For, let your husband gallivant as much as he pleases with a circus-rider that jumps through paper hoops every night, you are none the less the Comtesse de Valvins—a name that sounds well, while mine diffuses an odor of sugar-cane that can be detected at a league's distance. When I am out of an evening, and the announcers cry, "The carriage of Madame de Pirocava!" all the footmen burst out laughing, and call out all sorts of jests and puns at my servants.

SUZANNE

And that sort of thing makes you wish to marry again, in order to occupy a different social position?

VALENTINE

It seems to me that with twelve million francs——

SUZANNE

Ha! ha! My dear, in these days that is not considered an enormous sum, particularly if you aspire to marry a prince.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE

Well, it is true that two princes have offered their hands, and that I have refused them.

SUZANNE

What! Two real princes?

VALENTINE

The real thing, my dear—one was old and the other young. I refused the former because he was decrepit from rheumatism, and the latter because he was overwhelmed with debts.

SUZANNE

Which no doubt he wished you to pay—with your twelve millions!

VALENTINE

Yes, and I even thought of doing it; but after my man of business had investigated the Prince's affairs, he calculated that if a settlement were effected with all the creditors, not enough money would remain to allow me to hire a carriage by the month! This prospect put a damper on my ambition to become a princess. Now, if you would only be good, and give up Monsieur de Montlouis to me—

SUZANNE (*crosses L.*)

Never in the world!

VALENTINE

But, since you can not marry him yourself—

SUZANNE (*melodramatically*)

What matters that? We could fly together to a dis-

MOUNT IDA

tant clime, there to hide our happiness, as did the lovers in *La Favorita*.

VALENTINE

Yes, but suppose you are not *la favorita*?

SUZANNE

Then, no doubt, you would be the chosen one, since Julia refuses to enter into competition. But no, I never will yield an inch of ground, and I shall take all chances.

VALENTINE

All chances? But—listen!—I will purchase your chances if you will sell them!

SUZANNE

Temptress, avaunt! . . . For how much?

VALENTINE

Whatever you please, cash down! I have my cheque-book in my pocket.

SUZANNE

You wish me to be the appraiser? You will allow that it is a little difficult to estimate the value of the object! Let us see! Allow me another peep into that mirror. . . . Good! . . . He has his back turned—it is a superb back! Other good items are: fine, broad shoulders, a graceful, firm neck, waving hair—

VALENTINE (*with conviction*)

Yes; on the coast of Guinea he would be worth his weight in gold!

SUZANNE

Indeed! That may be true, but are we talking about the purchase of a negro, you little wretch?

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE (*with irritation*)

That means you do not wish to sell him to me.

SUZANNE

Dear me! Do you really mean that you are in love with him?

VALENTINE (*excitedly*)

Oh, I don't know! But this indecision—this rivalry—these delays—and, above all, the idea that he may prefer you to me, give me a vertigo, act on my nerves, and—in short, we must end this at any price! (*Paces up and down stage with agitation*)

SUZANNE (*crosses R., also very nervous*)

Ah, do you indeed feel like that? Well, so do I! It gets on my nerves, too! Julia's confidences—her domestic happiness—and, above all, the idea that you might at last be happy with Monsieur de Montlouis before my very face, under my very eyes—all this hurts me, irritates me, and, as you say, we must end it at any price. (*Utters a cry of inspiration*) Ah, I have thought of a way!

VALENTINE (*melodramatically*)

Quick! What is it?

SUZANNE

A moment ago you proposed that I should, like a coward, sell to you my hopes regarding this man whom we both love—for we do love him; there is no doubt about that!

VALENTINE (*earnestly*)

Oh, yes, we love him!

MOUNT IDA

SUZANNE

Very well! Now, I have every confidence in my own right, but I propose to you that we let the justice of Fate settle the matter.

VALENTINE

What! A duel to the death? I must have time to reflect.

SUZANNE

No, no! A duel without blood, my dear! (*Solemnly*) There is a table, and there are cards! I will play with you for Monsieur de Montlouis, at any game you may choose!

VALENTINE

That idea was a stroke of genius! (*Aside, while taking a chair to the table*) With the good luck that I usually have, I am sure to win! (*Aloud*) I accept! (*Sits at L. of table*)

SUZANNE (*sits R. of table*)

What shall we play?

VALENTINE

Ecarté; that is played quickest.

SUZANNE (*gravely*)

Shall we say five points?

VALENTINE

Yes, five—as they do in the army.

SUZANNE

Very well! Cut!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE (*cuts cards*)

There! And try not to make a misdeal.

SUZANNE (*dryly*)

A misdeal! Do you think I am infirm? . . . There, now! Quick, it is your turn to choose. Do you wish other cards?

VALENTINE

No, I will keep these, to save time. What is the trump?

SUZANNE

Hearts!

VALENTINE

Hearts? I mark the king.

SUZANNE

And so do I! (*The two women stare at each other in amazement*)

VALENTINE

What! You, too? The king of hearts?

SUZANNE

Certainly. I could mark even more than one of them, since I have given myself two. Look! (*Shows her hand*)

VALENTINE (*rises*)

And do you call that a fair game? With packs of kings all prepared and hidden in your sleeves!

SUZANNE (*examines the cards on the table*)

Not at all! Don't you see that you yourself made me deal a hand for écarté from the four bezique packs?

MOUNT IDA

VALENTINE

You are right! I beg your pardon! Let us deal the cards over again.

SUZANNE (*tosses the cards in the air*)

No! Enough of that! We shall never finish the game! (*Tragically*) But let him come, I say, this man —to put an end to this! That second cigar must have been finished long ago; let us at least prevent him from lighting a third! (*Goes up stage*)

VALENTINE (*lifts her hands*)

How she loves him! Heavens! how she loves him!

SUZANNE (*goes to window at the back, and looks out; speaks in a changed voice*)

Look, my dear, a carriage has just drawn up before the house.

VALENTINE (*speaks also in her natural tone*)

It is not likely to be a visitor at this hour. It seems more probable that some one is to be taken to the railway station.

SUZANNE (*comes down stage*)

No, because for that purpose they always harness the post-horses; whereas I recognized perfectly, by the light of the lantern, Julia's own chestnut cobs.

VALENTINE

Her own cobs? (*Utters a loud cry*) O heavens!

SUZANNE

You frighten me!

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE (*excitedly*)

Suppose it were—

SUZANNE (*also excitedly*)

An elopement?

VALENTINE

Suppose, as I have always thought, that Julia has only pretended to be a Minerva!

SUZANNE (*greatly agitated*)

Perhaps you are right!

VALENTINE

Suppose, while we have been disputing here, that the man whom we adore—for we do adore him, do we not?

SUZANNE (*with exaltation*)

Oh, yes, we adore him!

VALENTINE

Suppose that *she* has profited by our absence to make him award her the apple and to fly with her!

SUZANNE (*runs to the window*)

To a distant clime? . . . No more doubt is possible! Behold Monsieur de Montlouis entering the carriage!

VALENTINE (*loudly*)

With Julia?

SUZANNE (*sighs with relief*)

No, alone! (*Comes down stage and stands l. of table, facing VALENTINE*)

MOUNT IDA

VALENTINE (*leans on table R.*)

European that you are, you do not comprehend, then, that this is a mere ruse? That the tigress has gone a few paces ahead of him into the jungle, and that she will come bounding to his side under the cover of the first thicket?

SUZANNE

Ah! But we must not allow them to play us such a trick! (*Rushes to the window, opens it, and waves her hand*) Coachman!

VALENTINE (*follows SUZANNE'S action*)

Coachman! (*Both wave their handkerchiefs*)

SCENE III

JULIA (*enters through folding-doors L. and pauses, astonished*)

Well, what is going on here? The window open at ten o'clock in the evening at this time of the year! (*SUZANNE and VALENTINE turn suddenly, with the air of two erring schoolgirls discovered by their teacher; they try to stand before the open window in such a way as to conceal it*) Why, what are you doing? Are you mad?

SUZANNE (*embarrassed*)

Oh! . . . Is that you, Julia?

JULIA

Certainly it is I.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

VALENTINE

So it is! Do you know, we hardly expected to see you again this evening!

JULIA

I am not aware that it is my custom to retire to my room without bidding good-night to my guests. But, tell me at once, why do you both look so flurried, and why is that window open?

SUZANNE

I—I was just about to explain. You see, the gentlemen smoked so many cigars out there—(*shuts the window*)

VALENTINE. (*comes down stage R.*)

And then—since we saw the shepherd Paris getting into your own carriage—

JULIA (*comes down stage C.*)

Oh-h! So you believed that Minerva wished to spirit him away from you, or at least to shield him from your fascinations?

SUZANNE (*comes down stage L.*)

Well! Put yourself in our place!

JULIA

Even after the confidences that I made to you!
(*SUZANNE and VALENTINE make movements of doubt*)
Isn't that just like women!

VALENTINE

But how do you explain this abrupt departure of

MOUNT IDA

Monsieur de Montlouis before he had had time to make his choice among us?

JULIA

I will give you the explanation immediately. First, I must assure you that I did all I could to keep him here, according to my promise to you. I even reminded him of the fact that I am a patroness of the "Hospitality for the Night" institution, in order to persuade him to sleep here; when suddenly a special messenger arrived with a most urgent telegram for him. As soon as he had read it he turned very pale, then begged me to arrange to have him taken immediately to the station so that he might catch the last train to town, adding that his aunt was dying and that he must, at any cost, be in Paris before midnight. So now you know the reason why I ordered my chestnut cobs to be harnessed.

SUZANNE

That is all very well, but to depart without taking leave of us——

VALENTINE

I must say that I think his conduct was rather rude.

JULIA

As for his excuse—that is, the telegram, which, in the haste of his departure, he let fall upon the floor—I picked it up and put it in a safe place: the secret drawer where Mademoiselle d'Hautefort hid, under the very nose of King Louis Thirteenth, the private notes that she received in those days. Behold the bit of evidence! (*Draws a telegram from her bosom ; VALENTINE and*

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

SUZANNE *try to seize the paper*) Pardon me! Have a little patience! (*Reads address*) "Comte de Montlouis, Château de Chartrettes, Bois-le-Roi, Seine-et-Marne. Messenger paid." See! this is the address, if you wish to verify it.

SUZANNE

That is useless—we know that already.

VALENTINE

Yes, yes! Read us the contents.

JULIA

Listen! (*Reads*) "Having heard that the château de Chartrettes is full of society women with whom you are flirting——"

VALENTINE

Well, where is the harm in that?

SUZANNE

Stiff old prude!

JULIA (*reads*)

"I desire that you return to sleep in Paris."

SUZANNE

She must think we tried to hold him here by force!

VALENTINE

What a funny old girl!

JULIA (*reads*)

"Think well! If you do not come to find me this evening after I have finished my dance——"

MOUNT IDA

VALENTINE

What! She is dying, and yet she dances!

SUZANNE

Saint Vitus's dance, probably!

JULIA

Listen! Here is the explanation! (*Reads*) "If you do not come to find me this evening after I have finished my dance in the Coppélia ballet, the Baron will take me home; and if he takes me home, he will henceforth take your place altogether. Signed: Pontchartrain." So his aunt is Mademoiselle Pontchartrain of the Opéra! Now are you satisfied? (*Goes up stage, and during the following speeches she lights the two candles on the table at back of stage*)

SUZANNE (*sadly*)

The three goddesses are abandoned.

VALENTINE (*sadly*)

Alas, yes! The shepherd Paris has returned to his flock!

SUZANNE

Do you care?

VALENTINE

I? Not at all! So long as I know it is neither one of you two that he prefers to me, I care not a fig for the fourth.

SUZANNE

Nor do I! Besides, comparing dancer with dancer, I think I prefer the one my husband has. At least, she serves in the cavalry! Yes, decidedly, I will patiently await the return of my Ulysses.

PHILIPPE DE MASSA

JULIA (*offers SUZANNE a candle*)
And you will do quite right. Here, fair vestal!

SUZANNE (*dryly*)

Thank you!

VALENTINE

As for myself, I shall marry the old prince.

SUZANNE

In spite of his rheumatism?

VALENTINE

Oh, never mind that! My maid shall massage him!
(*Takes candle from JULIA*) Thank you.

JULIA

And now, my dear friends, good-night! Have both
of you all that you require for the night?

SUZANNE

Ah, spare us your irony!

VALENTINE (*to JULIA*)

Pious hypocrite!

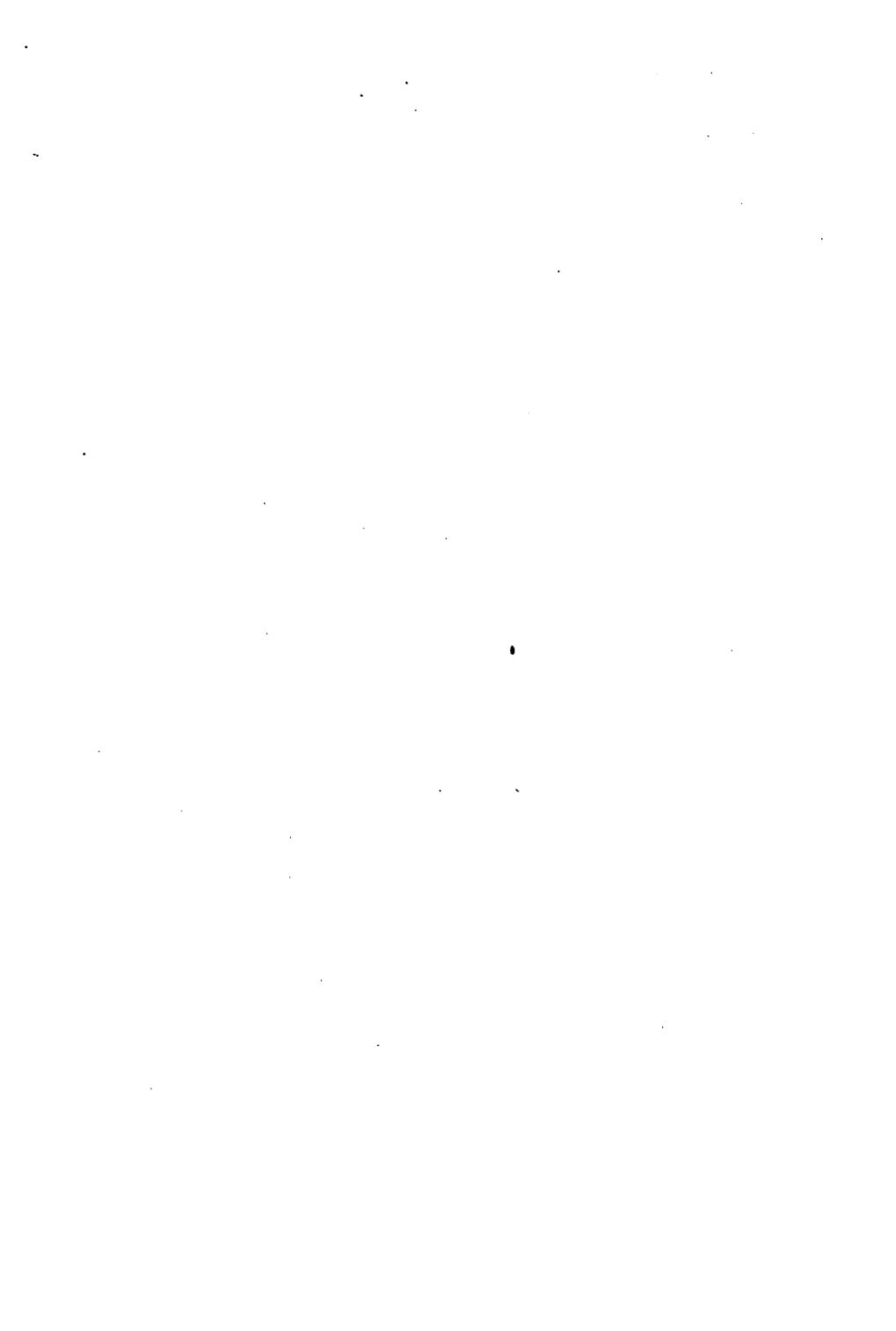
JULIA

Why am I a pious hypocrite?

SUZANNE

Heavens! Are you not the luckiest of all of us? You
did not get the apple, it is true, but at least you have a
noble heart to love you!

CURTAIN





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